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# JOHN WESLEY

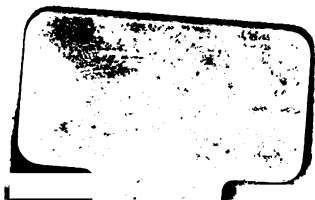
His Life and His Work



M. LELIÈVRE.

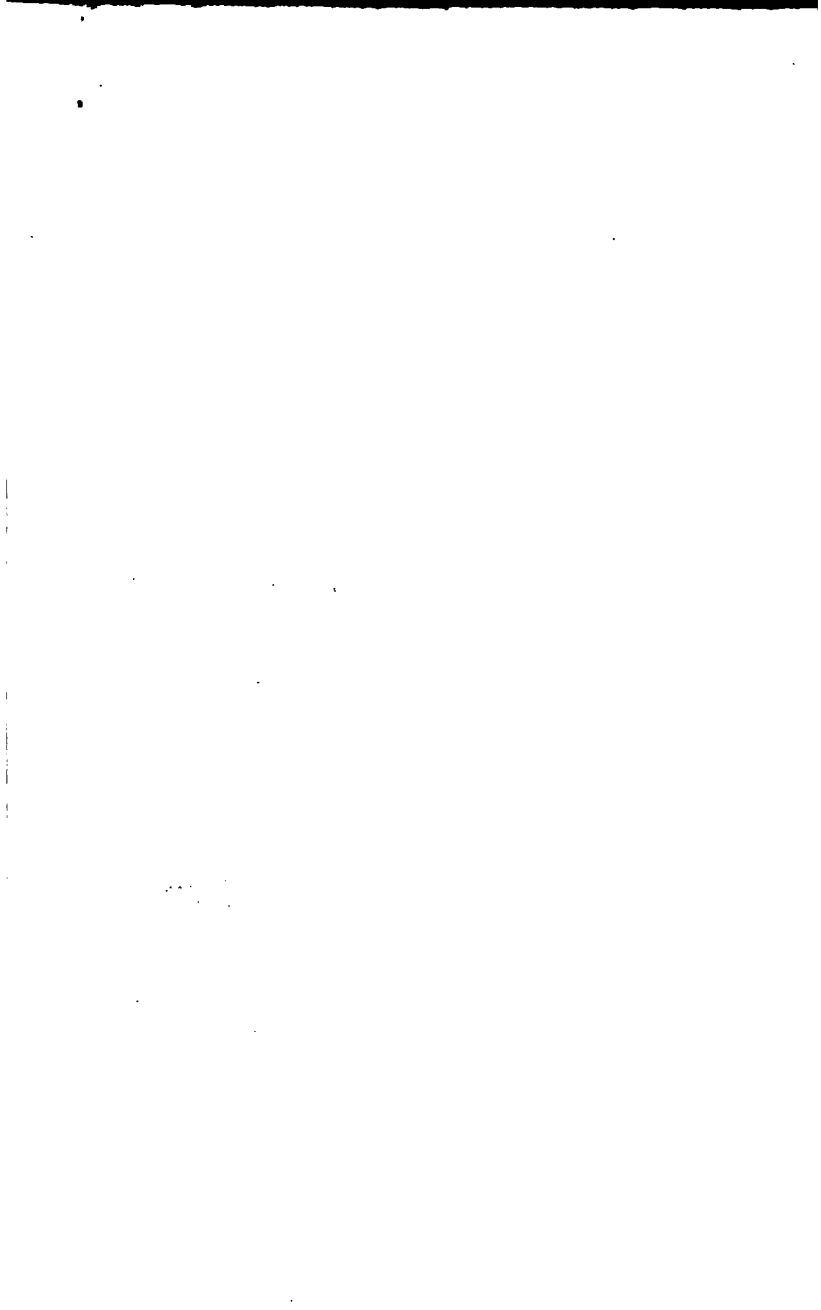


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REV. JOHN WESLEY, A.M.







# JOHN WESLEY:

## HIS LIFE AND HIS WORK.

BY THE  
REV. MATTHEW LELIÈVRE.

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TRANSLATED BY THE  
REV. A. J. FRENCH, B.A.



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“There were giants in the earth in those days.”—GENESIS vi. 4.

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## PREFACE.

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A FEW words will suffice to explain the origin of this volume. The French Methodists being unprovided with any standard Life of Wesley, the French Conference threw open the subject to competition, offering a prize for the best production. By the unanimous consent of the adjudicators the palm was awarded to the Rev. Matthieu Lelièvre.

Several Lives of Wesley have recently appeared in this country, but it has been thought that the present little work will have a place and a value of its own. The best authorities have been consulted in its compilation, and great pains taken to ensure accuracy of statement. The writer has succeeded in setting before his readers a condensed, yet clear and graphic, history of a man whose memory he deeply reveres, and whose character he knows how to measure at its true altitude. The numerous particulars lately given in the Life by the Rev. Luke Tyerman, while intensely interesting, as everything must be that refers to Wesley, do not modify in any essential feature the portrait here given. Indeed, his character was so transparently genuine that, the more thorough

the investigation, the stronger will be the conviction of its intrinsic excellence and completeness. None the less, however, should it be touched tenderly and discreetly by those whose business it may be to describe it. To this happy combination in the biographer of impartiality and reverence every page of this volume bears witness. If it shall inspire into some of Wesley's followers a fuller appreciation of, and affection for, their venerable Founder, and a more earnest desire to tread in his steps, the aim of the author and of the translator alike will have been abundantly accomplished.

A. J. F.

*Lake House, near South Shields.*

# CONTENTS.

## BOOK I.

### THE PREPARATION.

(1703—1738.)

#### CHAPTER I.—THE EPWORTH PARSONAGE. 1703—1714.

The Isle of Axholme—Birth of John Wesley—His Ancestry—Character of Samuel Wesley, his Father—Susanna Wesley: her Character—Family Education: its Principles and Methods—Domestic Trials—Fire at the Rectory—Providential Deliverance of John Wesley—His Early Piety . . . . . PAGES 1—9

#### CHAPTER II.—THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD. 1714—1735.

Wesley at the Charterhouse School—Wesley at Oxford—His Course of Study—His Talents—His Loneliness—Distressing Questions—Maternal Counsels—The *Imitation of Jesus Christ*—Works of Jeremy Taylor and William Law—Theological Views—Wesley in Deacon's Orders—Fellow of Lincoln College—Professor of Greek Literature—Charles Wesley—Band of Students—Called Methodists—John Wesley at Epworth—Desires Retirement—Returns to Oxford—Influence on his Friends—Asceticism and Activity—George Whitefield—Opposition—Wesley's Illness—Spiritual State . . . . . PAGES 9—18

#### CHAPTER III.—MISSION TO AMERICA. 1735—1737.

Offer of a Living: Wesley's Refusal—Mission to Georgia—The Voyage—Bodily Austerities—Economy of Time—The Moravians—Their Behaviour in the Midst of Danger—Their Example—Arrival—Conversation with Spangenberg—A Moravian Community—Evangelization of the Indians—Hindrances to Success—Evangelization of the Colonists—Formation of Societies—Wesley's Influence—Causes of Failure—Violent Opposition—Wesley's Departure.

PAGES 18—26

## CHAPTER IV.—CONVERSION. 1738.

Wesley's Dejection of Mind—Need of Conversion—Interviews with Böhler—Rapid Progress—Seeks Deliverance—Circumstances attending Conversion—Development of Spiritual Life—Conversion of Charles Wesley and Whitefield—Wesley Visits the Moravian Settlements—His Interviews with Zinzendorf—Impressions of Herrnhuth—Christian David—Methodism and the Moravians. PAGES 26—36

## CHAPTER V.—MORAL AND RELIGIOUS CONDITION OF ENGLAND AT THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

Incompleteness of the English Reformation—Church and State—Puritanism—England in the Eighteenth Century—Outward Prosperity—General Corruption among the Upper Classes—Venality, Dissipation, Infidelity—Infidelity *à la mode*—Degradation of the Lower Classes—Power of the Mob—The *Mohawks*—Drunkenness, Superstition, and Ignorance—Attempts at Reformation—The Essayists—Society for the Reformation of Manners—Religious Societies—The Anglican Clergy: their Indifference and Immorality—Exceptions—General Character of their Preaching—Testimony of Pious Churchmen—The Nonconformists—Criticisms of Voltaire—Voltaire and Wesley . . . . . PAGES 36—53

## BOOK II.

## THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE WORK.

(1738—1744.)

## CHAPTER I.—BIRTH OF THE MOVEMENT. 1738—1739.

The Moravian Societies in London—Wesley Preaches in the Churches—The Pulpits Closed—Wesley among the Prisoners—New-Year's Day, 1739—Whitefield Preaches in the Open Air at Kingswood and Bristol—Wesley Follows his Example—Wesley at

Bristol—Foundation of the “United Societies”—The First Chapel—Kingswood School—Features of his Itinerancy—Remarkable Conversions—Physical Manifestations—Wesley at Moorfields—Charles Wesley before the Archbishop of Canterbury—John Wesley before the Bishop of Bristol—Close of the Year 1739. PAGES 54—69

CHAPTER II.—INTERNAL DIVISIONS : EXTERNAL PROGRESS.  
1740—1741.

Errors of the Moravians—Wesley’s Separation—The Foundery—Fruitless attempts at Reconciliation—Various Feelings of the People towards Wesley—Mobs at Bristol and London—Wesley’s Courage—The Clergy—Progress of the Bristol Society—Growth and Extension of the Societies—Their Liberality—Difference between Wesley and Whitefield concerning Predestination—Disputes among the Members—The Sermon “On Free Grace”—Whitefield’s Reply—Separation from Wesley—Results of the Division. PAGES 69—80

CHAPTER III.—LAY PREACHING. THE NORTH. 1742.

A Difficult Problem—Lay Helpers—Thomas Maxfield—Influence of Susanna Wesley at this Crisis—Development of this Agency—The London Classes—Labours of Nelson in the North—Wesley Sets out for the North—Wayside Adventure—Wesley at Birstal—Wesley at Newcastle—Vast Assemblages—Formation of a Society—Wesley at Epworth—Preaches on his Father’s Tombstone—The Methodists and the Magistrate—Death of Susanna Wesley.

PAGES 80—89

CHAPTER IV.—CONFLICTS AND PERSECUTIONS. 1743—1744.

Wesley in the North—Investigation of the Physical Manifestations—Formation of Circuits—Wesley’s Visit to Placey—Disturbances in London—Intervention of the Magistrates—Charles Wesley Attacked by the Mob—Privations in Cornwall—Wesley among the Wednesbury and Walsall Mobs—His Fearlessness in Danger—Conversion of a Ringleader—A Lost Sheep Restored to the Fold—More Persecutions in Staffordshire—Connivance of the Magistrates and Clergy—Impressment of the Preachers—Public Opinion respecting Wesley . . . . . PAGES 89—102



## CHAPTER V.—THE FIRST CONFERENCE. 1744.

Composition of the Conference—Preparatory Services—Rules of Procedure—Doctrinal Basis of Methodism—Method of Preaching—Relation of the Societies to the Established Church—Internal Discipline—Rules of the Society—The Class-Meeting—Lay Preaching—Wesley's Authority over his Preachers—Close of the Conference—State of the Work—Numerical and Moral Results—Opposition of the Populace—Antagonism of the Clergy and Civil Authorities—A New Era . . . . . PAGES 103—111

## BOOK III.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WORK.

(1744—1770.)

## CHAPTER I.—CONFLICTS AND SUCCESSES. 1744—1747.

Wesley Preaches before the University of Oxford—Labours, Dangers, and Sufferings—Wayside Usefulness—Cornwall—Wesley under Arrest—The Falmouth Mob—Wales: Pleasing Reception—Methodism in the Army and on the Field of Battle—Battle of Fontenoy—Wesley's Patriotism—Landing of the Pretender—Wesley at Newcastle—His Use of the Press—False Doctrine—Progress in the South-West—Successes in the North—A Liberal Society—Wesley Attacked by the Mob at Plymouth—His Courage—Change of Scene in Cornwall . . . . . PAGES 112—125

## CHAPTER II.—METHODISM IN IRELAND. 1747—1750.

Religious Condition of Ireland—Wesley Arrives at Dublin—First Impressions—Encouraging Results of his First Labours—Terrible Persecution—Extraordinary Conversion of Two Irishmen—Wesley's Second Visit—Remarkable Success at Athlone and elsewhere—

Wesley and the Priests—Persecution at Cork—Butler, the Ballad-Singer—Connivance of the Magistrates—The Chapel Pillaged—Culpable Excesses—Clergyman Heading the Mob—Close of the Strife—Success of Methodism in Ireland—An Irish Martyr, Thomas Walsh . . . . . PAGES 125—136

CHAPTER III.—RAPID PROGRESS. 1748—1760.

Clerical Coadjutors : Thompson, Perronet, Grimshaw, Fletcher—"Address to the Clergy"—Progress of Methodism in Cornwall—Wesley in Scotland—Marvellous Progress throughout the Kingdom : Birmingham, Wednesbury, Darlaston, Wakefield, Hull, Chester, Charlton, Hornby, Manchester, Liverpool, Keighley, York, Sheffield, Wandsworth, Epworth, Newcastle—Opposition Vanquished almost universally—Exceptions—Wesley's Demeanour toward the Mob—Internal Affairs of the Societies—Wesley and Whitefield—Wesley's Acknowledgment of the Hand of God—His Incessant Activity—His Serenity of Mind—His Frugality and Liberality—Wesley's Marriage—Domestic Troubles—Dangerous Illness—Whitefield's Letter—Convalescence and Literary Labours . . . . . PAGES 136—155

CHAPTER IV.—INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PROSPERITY. AMERICA. 1760—1770.

Wesley approaching Old Age—Christian Perfection—Great Revival among the Societies in England and Ireland—General Results—Dissensions in the London Societies—Expulsion of George Bell—Enthusiasm—A Division—General State of the Work—Large Congregations at the Open-Air Preaching—Success in Ireland and Scotland—Disturbances Checked—Wesley's Authority over the Multitude—Friendly Feeling of the Magistrates—Ill-will and Opposition of the Clergy—Bishops Lavington and Warburton—Hervey's Letters—Expulsion of Six Students from Oxford—Fletcher—Foundation of American Methodism—Its Providential Character—Death of Whitefield . . . . . PAGES 156—170

CHAPTER V.—ORGANIZATION AND DISCIPLINE.

Doctrinal Questions Discussed at the Early Conferences—Relation of the Societies to the Established Church—Modification of Wesley's

Views—Endeavours after Re-union—The Societies Demand the Sacraments—Decision of the Conference of 1755—Second Effort after Unity—Its Failure—Wesley's Purity of Motive—Rules respecting the Admission of Preachers—Wesley's Care for their Intellectual Development—Their Itinerancy—Their Self-Renunciation—Finances—Usefulness of Wesley's Helpers—Preparation for the Future—State of the Societies—Successive Stages of their Organization—Wesley's Power—Close of this Period.

PAGES 171—184

## BOOK IV.

### THE EVENING OF LIFE.

(1770—1791.)

#### CHAPTER I.—WESLEY'S VIGOROUS OLD AGE. 1770—1780.

Astonishing Physical Vigour, Activity, and Cheerfulness—Universal Affection and Respect—Interesting Conversions—Social and Religious Progress Throughout England—Wesley in Scotland—Wesley in Ireland—Incidents of Travel—State of the Work—Opposition Vanquished—Attitude of the Upper Classes and of the Clergy—Wesley's Relation to the Societies—Wesley and the Cure of Souls—Wesley and the Poor—Dr. Dodd—City-Road Chapel, London—Numerous Publications—Great Calvinistic Controversy—Fletcher as a Controversialist—Results of this Decade—New Preachers—Wesley's Confidence in the Future . . . PAGES 185—200

#### CHAPTER II.—LAST YEARS. 1780—1790.

Wesley's Protracted Vigour—His Luminous Intellect—His Serenity of Mind—Portrait of Wesley in his Old Age—Universal Respect and Affection—Undiminished Success of his Preaching—Cornwall—Reception in Ireland—Extraordinary Popularity—Touching Scenes—Wesley in the Administration of Discipline—Wesley's Love for Children—Success of his Labours among them—Establishment of Sunday Schools—Correspondence—Last Missionary Journeys—Two Visits to Holland—Visit to the Channel Isles—Origin and

Progress of the Work in the Islands—Jane Bisson—The Channel Isles and French Methodism—Declension of Wesley's Physical Vigour—Deaths of his chief Fellow-Labourers : Fletcher ; Charles Wesley—Fresh Accessions—The End Near . PAGES 201—217

CHAPTER III.—ORGANIZATION OF THE AMERICAN METHODIST CHURCH. DEED OF DECLARATION. 1784.

Progress of Methodism in America—Relation of the Preachers to the Anglican Church—Methodism and the American Revolution—The Revolution and the Anglican Church—Demands of the American Societies—A Difficult Problem—Wesley's Efforts to Solve it—Progress of Wesley's Ecclesiastical Views—Organization of the American Methodist Episcopal Church—Its Success—Ecclesiastical Position of English Methodism—Legal Obstacles—Deed of Declaration : its Advantages and Disadvantages. PAGES 217—227

CHAPTER IV.—WESLEY'S LAST LABOURS : HIS DEATH.  
1790—1791.

Physical Enfeeblement—Labours in London and the Neighbourhood—Last Journey to the North—Deep Interest Excited—State of the Societies—Touching Scene at Halifax—Wesley in Scotland—Newcastle—Remarkable Deliverance—Wesley's Reflections on his Eighty-Seventh Birthday—Last Conference—Preaching in and about London—Last Entry in his Journal—Last Entry in his Cash-Book—Last Letter to America—Last Sermon—Rapid Failure of Strength—Letter to Wilberforce, Written by Wesley Four Days before his Death—Last Sabbath—Languor and Weakness—Last Words—The Closing Scene—Death of John Wesley—His Funeral.

PAGES 228—246

CHAPTER V.—WESLEY'S CHARACTER.

Wesley as a Man and as a Christian—His perfect Sincerity—His Alleged Credulity—His Alleged Ambition—His Trust in Providence—His Piety—His Catholic Spirit—His Natural Temperament—His Amiability—Wesley as a Preacher—His Moral Authority—His Puissant Logic—His Appeals to Conscience—His Applications—

His Astonishing Success—Index to the Character of the Nation—Wesley as an Author—Great Variety of his Publications—Principal Works—His Qualities as a Writer—Wesley as an Administrator—Testimonies of Buckle and Macaulay—Completeness of Character.

PAGES 246—259

#### CHAPTER VI.—WESLEY'S WORK AND ITS RESULTS.

Direct Results of Wesley's Work—Theology: that of the Reformation—Universality of the Atonement—Repentance, Faith, Justification, Regeneration—Entire Sanctification, or Christian Perfection—Witness of the Spirit—Final Perseverance Conditional—Character and Effects of such a Theology—Organization—The Society—The Class-Meeting—The Ticket of Membership—Various Means of Grace—Officers of the Society—Preachers—Circuits—The Itinerancy—The Conference—Numerical Strength of the Societies at the Death of Wesley and in the Present Day—Indirect Results—Regeneration of England—Upper and Lower Classes—Testimonies of Priestley and Macaulay, and of Messieurs Scherer, De Witt, and Saint-Marc Girardin—The Anglican Church and the Dissenting Bodies—England in Modern Times—Conclusion. PAGES 260—274

# LIFE OF WESLEY.

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## BOOK FIRST.

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### THE PREPARATION.

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(1703—1738.)

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#### CHAPTER I.

##### *THE EPWORTH PARSONAGE.*

1703—1714.

TOWARD the north-western boundary of Lincolnshire there lies a small tract of land, called the Isle of Axholme. Its area is about one hundred and twenty square miles, and its denomination is derived from the fact that it is encompassed as with a girdle by the waters of the Trent, the Don, the Idle, and a canal which connects the two last-named rivers. This district, redeemed from the waters and enriched by husbandry, has become one of the most fertile parts of the country. Its chief town, Epworth, has a population of two thousand souls: it is irregularly built, but pleasantly situated on the brow of a hill.

This town, quiet enough except on market days, when the country people flock into it from the neighbouring

villages, would have acquired but little notoriety, had it not been the birth-place of the Founder of Methodism, whose life we are about to narrate. There, on the 17th of June, 1703, JOHN WESLEY was born: there he spent his early years, and began to prepare all unconsciously for that work to which God had called him. His home-training exerted so powerful an influence upon his character, that it demands a detailed investigation.

Wesley was of sacerdotal descent: his father and both his grandfathers were pious and eminent clergymen, who had displayed noble qualities amid the struggles through which the nation had passed during the seventeenth century. From his infancy, Wesley's spirit was nurtured by the noble traditions of a family with whom piety and strength of character appear to have been hereditary. The recollection of the Christian virtues of his ancestry must have exercised a beneficial influence. Besides, those virtues flourished anew under his very eyes in the lives of his father and mother, both of whom sprang from the genuine Puritan stock.

His father, Samuel Wesley, had been made rector of the parish of Epworth in one of the last years of the seventeenth century, through the patronage of Queen Mary. Though of Nonconformist birth, he early diverged from the ecclesiastical views of his parents, and, with no other resources than those supplied by his precocious talents and marvellous literary activity, he maintained himself at Oxford, where he prepared for the ministry of the Established Church. The energy of will of which he gave such proof in these struggles was not lacking in the sequel of his career. He made his way in spite of the political and religious strifes of the age, forming views of his own with the utmost independence, and defending them with uncommon vigour. Pamphleteer, journalist, and orator by turns, he threw himself into all the controversies

of the day, offering the aid of his pen and tongue to whatever cause attracted his ardent and generous soul. His self-consuming activity was equal to anything. From his obscure parsonage were scattered throughout England the most diverse productions, including political and religious pamphlets, newspaper articles, poems, commentaries, and treatises on theology. Possessed of sympathies rather broad than deep, Samuel Wesley must at least have imparted to his sons a taste for great things.

Besides his ardent disposition and habit of self-assertion, he displayed other very valuable qualities, not the least important of which was a sincere desire to do good. He devoted himself energetically to the discharge of his pastoral duties. His faithfulness, amounting at times to severity, entailed some serious inconveniences. On one occasion, some of his parishioners revenged themselves by sending him to gaol for a trifling debt which he could not just then pay. Others, as we shall see, carried their malice so far as to set fire to the parsonage.

True, the rector's theology was very defective. His age was that of the morning twilight, and he belonged to his age. Notwithstanding, he had a kind of prophetic presentiment of the important religious revolution which was about to break forth, and of which his sons were to be the chief apostles. On his death-bed, he hailed with ardour the dawn of the rising revival, and, laying his hand on the head of his son Charles, exclaimed, "Be steady: the Christian faith will surely revive in this kingdom; you will see it, though I shall not." He was one of those few Christians who, even at this early period of the eighteenth century, coveted for their country the honour of large missionary enterprises. He even offered himself as a pioneer-missionary to the East. But the age was not ripe for such a movement: the idea seemed as strange as it was novel, and it had no results.



The rector of Epworth was fitted, both by natural disposition and by his many virtues, to guide the first steps of John Wesley ; and it would not be difficult to point out in the life of the latter many traces of the paternal influence. Striking, however, as these traces are, we may easily affirm that the moral and religious development of Wesley was still more largely owing to the influence of his mother. Susanna Wesley presents a specimen of a remarkably lofty mind : she is an antique model set in the midst of the eighteenth century. A daughter of Dr. Annesley, one of the most distinguished theologians of the previous age, she practised in the school of Puritanism a sturdy piety which shrank from no sacrifice, and acquired a character of masculine robustness. Rivalling in learning and devotion the ladies of the Reformation, she could not remain indifferent to the intellectual progress of her children in any department. She combined in equal measure the desire for advancement which marks an enlightened mind, and the strong, practical sagacity which proceeds from an upright heart. Contrary to the common course of things among the gentler sex, the unwonted development of the mental powers had in no degree arrested that of the moral qualities. Extraordinary as she was from an intellectual point of view, it was more especially as a wife and a mother that Susanna Wesley excelled. If her loving heart throbbed in sympathy with her husband's trials, she was also able to support by her influence the manly resolutions which she encouraged him to form. Herself the mother of nineteen children, she had all the virtues, as well as all the burdens, belonging to such a position. Her affection for her children was not a mere egotistical admiration : she regarded them as seed-plots which it was her duty to cultivate with jealous watchfulness. And when death came to reap down before her eyes the field which she had tended with so much affection, she bowed to the will of God ; and the outline of her

character shows firmer and clearer perhaps in her deep but truly Christian sorrow than in her palmiest days.

Under the humble roof of the Epworth rectory, the family life wore an aspect of charming austerity. The education and training of the children devolved on the intelligent and pious mother of whom we have just spoken. Constantly governed by a sense of her responsibility, it was hers to watch the moral and physical development of the twelve or thirteen children who survived the perils of infancy; it was hers to hold with steady hand the reins of this little government, keeping her eye on everything and stamping everything with the impress of her own methodical spirit. Mrs. Wesley guarded carefully against leaving the direction of her children to chance: having pondered in her own mind the best methods of instruction, she laid down fixed rules which she followed with the utmost exactness. Thus the mind of John Wesley was cast in the mould of a strictly Christian education: it was at this period that he received his most effective training. It will not be, therefore, an idle task to describe his mother's plan in a few words.

In this model family the children were subjected to discipline from their most tender years. Their hours of sleeping and eating were determined by rule, to which the very infants had to submit like the rest. At an early period they acquired habits of quietness rarely to be met with in large families: all loud crying was strictly forbidden. As the will of each child began to manifest itself, it became the object of special attention. "If you wish to train your children aright," said Susanna Wesley, "the first thing to be done is to conquer their will." Few mothers have succeeded so well in this difficult task. Her ordinary methods were kindness and persuasion, but if necessary, she had recourse to chastisement. On the other hand, perceiving that "the fear of punishment often tempts

children to falsehood," it was her custom always to forgive a fault that had been confessed. Influenced by such principles, Mrs. Wesley rightly required unconditional submission to an authority regulated by the deepest instincts of maternal love.

In the education of her children, she had the same fixed principles. Under no pretext, for instance, was a child permitted to learn to read before attaining its fifth year,—an excellent rule, designed not to overtax the immature intellect. But the day after its fifth anniversary was a memorable one in the family history: lessons were commenced in earnest, and the new pupil spent six hours in the school-room, at the close of which it was expected to have mastered the alphabet. This brief period, in nearly every instance, sufficed for the accomplishment of the task. At the second lesson, the Bible was opened, and the child was taught to spell a portion of the first chapter of Genesis. Mrs. Wesley declares that, after three months' practice in this manner, the children could read as well as many who pass for good readers. In order to the attainment of these results, she spared no pains. "I admire your patience," said her husband to her one day, "you have told this child the same thing at least twenty times." "I should have lost my labour," she replied, "if I had only told it him nineteen times, since it was only at the twentieth time that I succeeded." By her own incessant activity she taught her children the value of time, and they never forgot the lesson.

Susanna Wesley was an earnest Christian: the spiritual prosperity of her children was dearer to her heart than their intellectual progress. In their childhood she strove to acquaint them with the Holy Scriptures: she taught them simple prayers, as soon as their lips could pronounce the words. She was anxious personally to impart their earliest religious instruction; and there is still extant a

sort of manual which she composed for their use. She regularly devoted one or two hours every week to special conversation with each of them by turn: this little conference was remarkable for intimacy of fellowship, and fostered an openness of spirit which enabled the mother to follow closely the workings of her children's minds. These conversations exercised the most salutary influence on her son John: twenty years later, in a letter to his mother, he gratefully refers to them, asking her to set apart Thursday evening for him as formerly.

In the rapid sketch which we have drawn of the family education, our readers will not fail to have noticed the love of order which so strongly characterized Wesley at a later period, and which he inherited from his mother. It may also be said that in this family-school he acquired most of those great qualities which he ultimately displayed in the work to which God called him. While yet young he had imbibed lofty ideas concerning life and its duties.

Wesley's childhood was not exempt, however, from those trials which in the order of Divine providence play so important a part in the formation of all characters. More than once he saw stark poverty seated at the family board; and notwithstanding the prodigies of economy performed by his mother, his father died in debt. Death frequently visited their home, and dealt some ruthless blows. On two several occasions also, the parsonage was burnt: the first fire was owing to accident, and was only partial; but the second time the whole house was consumed by the flames. This fire was owing to the malice of some incorrigible parishioners, who took pleasure in revenging themselves for their pastor's faithfulness by burning his house over his head, and exposing his family to the risk of a frightful death.

It was on the 9th of February, 1709, towards midnight, that the fire broke out. A little girl of twelve, awakened by the blazing fragments which fell at her feet, gave

the alarm. Cries from without at the same moment roused every one in the house. It was time: the devouring element had already made considerable progress, and rendered nearly all the means of egress unavailable. The rector flew to the bed-room where his children slept, and with the aid of a servant enabled them to make their escape by the windows, and by the door that led to the garden. His wife, staying behind to secure the safety of the younger children, had to force her way through the flames. Thrice she was beaten back by their fierceness, but at last, gathering up her remaining strength and putting her trust in God, she rushed through the fire and escaped, with no further injury than some burns on her face and hands.

One child, however, was still missing. Little John was fast asleep in his bed, having been forgotten in the midst of the general alarm. His father, discovering his absence, made several attempts to pass the flames, but was compelled to retreat before their fury. Then, falling on his knees, he commended his child's soul into the hands of God. Meanwhile the boy, waking from his sleep, flew to the window, where he was soon observed by those below. There being no time to fetch a ladder, one man mounted the shoulders of another, and rescued the child at the very moment that the roof fell in and dashed the chamber to the ground. "Come, neighbours," exclaimed the father, as he received his son, "let us kneel down; let us give thanks unto God: He has given me all my eight children; let the rest go, I am rich enough."

John Wesley preserved the memory of this providential deliverance to the end of his life. Under one of his portraits he had engraved the picture of a house in flames, with the inscription, "Is not this a brand plucked from the burning?"

From that moment his pious mother, so she tells us,

formed the resolution "to watch with particular care over a child whom God had spared in so much mercy." She strove to inspire the conviction that he belonged, body and soul, to that God whose Fatherly hand had been so visibly stretched forth in his defence. Her efforts were rewarded by the early piety of the child, who gave proof of being under strong religious impressions at an age when others think of little but the amusements of childhood. Hence his father believed it his duty to admit him to the holy Sacrament when he was only eight years old.

But the hour was come when the child was to leave his quiet home in order to enter more fully on his studies, and on the sober realities of life.

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## CHAPTER II.

### *THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD.*

1714—1735.

IN 1714, at the early age of eleven, John Wesley bade adieu to the parsonage, where his first years had rolled so peacefully away. At the Charter-House School where he was now placed, he became remarkable for intelligence and studious habits; and his character was strengthened by intercourse with his school-fellows. He always retained agreeable recollections of this period, and loved in later life to visit the spot that reminded him of his youthful days. No striking feature of his religious character was developed, however, during this season of preparatory study.

In order to reach the decisive crisis of Wesley's spiritual life, we must follow him to the University of Oxford, where he arrived in 1720, and matriculated at Christ Church College. His application and intelligence soon marked

him out as one of the most distinguished students. Following his natural bent to classical studies, he devoted himself especially to the ancient authors; and his constant familiarity with the great masters resulted in the formation of a taste remarkable for its purity, as well as of a comprehensive intellect and a neat and vigorous style. Gifted with a fine imagination, he composed verses with rare facility and elegance, and strove to reproduce in his mother-tongue the graces of Latin poetry, or the severer strains of Hebrew psalmody. At the same time, he employed his original talents in the composition of sacred hymns for the edification of the Church.

But in addition to mere intellectual gifts, Wesley possessed a remarkably tender and deeply serious spirit. From the quiet retreat in which his youth was passed, he brought a character already formed, and imbued with a sacred regard for duty. Oxford was to be for him the scene of a sad revelation. There he saw the future pastors of the Church giving utterance to infidel and even blasphemous sentiments, and many of them openly leading irregular lives. We may easily imagine how utterly desolate he must have felt in the midst of this crowd of young scapegraces, whose pursuits were pleasure and vice: his rigid training had not prepared him for such spectacles as those which he now beheld. First sheer amazement, then deep anguish, filled his breast as he encountered these scenes of corruption. Happily, he had learned from his parents never to make concessions to evil. His education had been, it is true, in a religious point of view, limited to the formation of good desires and aspirations, but it had also developed within him extraordinary powers of resistance. To stand alone amid such opposition would have daunted a less determined spirit: Wesley could not shrink from accepting such a responsibility, when conscience declared it a duty.

Not yet, however, had he discovered the true foundations on which the spiritual edifice was to be reared: long years were to be spent in the search for them. Justification by faith, the central doctrine of the Reformation, was hidden from him by the web of scholastic subtlety in which it was involved: the horizon of his theology was that of the age in which he lived. But in Wesley there was combined with the disciple of tradition the Israelite without guile, already purposed to keep all the commandments of God. The study of theology was not in his case the parching process which it so frequently becomes:—the farther he advanced in the knowledge of the Bible, the more deeply he sounded the depths of his own heart. What distressed him was that he found there a secret alienation from God. How should the harmony be re-established between his soul and God, that God for whom it was made, and without whom it could not be happy? Was not this reconciliation an object to be unremittingly pursued, and could it be fully attained? Grave questions these, in confronting which the young theologian was troubled, but which he could not escape, since on their solution hinged his internal peace.

While the letters that Wesley at this period addressed to his father only dealt with questions of abstract theology, with his mother he felt himself more free; and he continued to keep her acquainted with the various phases of his interior life. Ever on the watch, she hailed with joy a religious crisis whose importance she fully understood. "And now," said she, "in good earnest, resolve to make religion the business of your life, for, after all, that is the one thing that, strictly speaking, is necessary; all things besides are comparatively little to the purposes of life. I heartily wish you would now enter upon a strict examination of yourself, that you may know whether you have a reasonable hope of salvation by Jesus Christ. If you have,



the satisfaction of knowing it will abundantly reward your pains; if you have not, you will find a more reasonable occasion for tears than can be met with in any tragedy."

At this critical epoch of his life, Wesley contracted a strong liking for a work which has always furnished food to meditative minds, the "*Imitation of Jesus Christ*." Notwithstanding the spirituality which breathes throughout this book, it is certain that an odour of the cloister pervades its pages, written as they were within the recesses of the cloister: moreover, though fitted to nourish a piety already robust, they might easily mislead a piety of immature growth. At first, Wesley did not take kindly to the "*Imitation*:" his first impressions of it were unfavourable. He complained to his mother of the extreme views of the author upon certain subjects, as for instance on mirth and pleasure. Her lofty and strong understanding appears in the answer she gave him. "Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes off the relish of spiritual things; in short, whatever increases the strength and authority of your body over your mind, that thing is sin to you, however innocent it may be in itself."

Jeremy Taylor's "*Rules for Holy Living and Dying*," which he read about the same time, more easily gained his confidence: from it he received a powerful bias toward mysticism. This book reconciled him also to the "*Imitation of Jesus*;" and the latter work became for many years his most favourite devotional manual. The works of William Law strengthened yet more his bent in this direction. Still, Wesley had too much independence of spirit to give himself up to a blind admiration of his spiritual guides, and in his correspondence he vigorously contests some of the opinions of his favourite authors. Strange to say, he seems to be already laying some of the foundation-stones of that system of doctrine which

was afterwards to bear his name. In speaking of final perseverance, of predestination, of the assurance of salvation, he already defends the views of which he was to become the champion for more than half a century. His ideas on assurance, for instance, are the more striking as they were far in advance of the theological creed of the day: these sprang from the attentive study of the Bible, whose influence already neutralized in part the injurious effects produced by the mystic authors.

In September, 1725, Wesley was ordained deacon, and in the following year elected a Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford. Thus placed in an independent position, he was enabled to observe a more regular method in his daily life; and, being thrown among strangers, he chose his new companions with care, actuated solely by the desire to preserve and improve his piety. He also resolved to keep a daily journal, in order that he might maintain a strict watch over his religious state. He partook of the Lord's Supper once a week, gave abundance of alms, and strove to attain sanctity by means of strict regularity of conduct.

Captivated thus with the contemplative life of the mediæval saints, and courting solitude amid the crowd of his fellow-students, his talents and success had meanwhile won universal respect. He was acknowledged by all parties to be a man of talents, and an excellent critic in the learned languages; in philosophical discussions he excelled; none wielded the syllogism with superior skill; none displayed greater readiness at repartee. The high opinion entertained of him in these respects by the authorities was soon publicly expressed by his being chosen Greek lecturer and "Moderator of the Classes." He was then only twenty-three years of age. In February, 1727, he took his degree of Master of Arts.

In the month of August of the same year, the Epworth

rector, weighed down by the infirmities of age, desired his son John to return home and assist him as his curate. In the following year, the latter visited Oxford for the purpose of taking priest's orders.

Meanwhile, Charles Wesley, who was five years John's junior, was pursuing his studies at the University, and, after a season of indifference and levity, was led to serious concern for his soul. He communicated his sentiments to some of his fellow-students, who in conjunction with him formed a little society, half religious, half literary. This association of students, bound by ties of friendship and a common sense of spiritual necessities, sprang up quite spontaneously, and was not long in becoming a focus of spiritual life. Nor was it long before it drew down upon itself contempt and persecution : it was called in derision "the Holy Club," and its members received the nickname of "Methodists." This word had been previously employed as a religious designation, and now became the generic name, first of the immediate disciples of Wesley, then of earnest Christians of every denomination, whom the world branded with a common stigma as it heaped upon them a common opprobrium.

While his brother was thus employed at Oxford, John Wesley was in retirement at Epworth, where he cultivated the society of his mystic authors, even more than that of his father's parishioners. Under this influence, which was continually gaining on him, he was led to seek complete seclusion, and he even took some steps to establish himself in a wild and remote Yorkshire valley, where he might devote his life to the instruction of youth. His mother, whose strong common sense detected the danger of such a course, dissuaded him from the project, saying, "Such a life would not suit your temperament, and I hope God has a greater work for you to do." During this sojourn in the North, he made the acquaintance of "a serious man," as he

calls him, who prevailed on him to abandon these extreme resolutions. "Sir," said he, "you wish to serve God and go to heaven; remember you cannot serve Him alone: you must, therefore, find companions or make them: the Bible knows nothing of solitary religion."

Urged by the rector of Lincoln College, who required his assistance, and impelled by his own natural tastes, Wesley returned to Oxford in November, 1729, and resumed his duties. Charles and his friends immediately rallied around him, glad to consign to stronger hands than theirs the management of their little society. It consisted at that time of four members, John Wesley, Charles Wesley, Morgan, and Kirkham. These friends were closely bound together, not only in their religious sympathies but in their studies. "They agreed to spend three or four evenings in the week together in reading the Greek Testament, with the Greek and Latin classics. On Sunday evenings they read divinity." Under John Wesley's auspices, the society drew up a rigid system of rules: its members were to fast two days in the week, to observe regularly a strict self-examination, and once a week to partake of the Lord's Supper. The ascetic tendencies of these young men, laudable as was the motive that inspired them, were not without danger; and they might have proved fatal at the outset to the religious movement of the eighteenth century, had they not been counterbalanced by a most remarkable development of Christian activity.

There belonged to this little Oxford band one young man who appears to have early communicated to it a most beneficial impulse in this direction. The profound piety of Morgan was allied, it is true, to a somewhat extravagant austerity: his self-imposed privations contributed indeed to shorten his life. Still, he was the first to employ himself actively in evangelical labours; his heart and his purse were always open to the poor; he collected around him

poor children, to whom he gave instruction and distributed good books: he prayed by the bedside of the dying, and ministered consolation to the afflicted. Morgan's example incited his companions to imitate him; and they adopted a plan for the regular visitation of the sick and the prisoners, and each one of them engaged to devote several hours a week to this work. But this course of action was so novel, and had such an appearance of irregularity, that, before fully committing himself to it, Wesley determined to ask his father's advice. The venerable old man accorded his highest approbation to his plans. Thus encouraged, the young theologian gave himself up to the work with self-consuming zeal, hoping by this means to find the peace which as yet he did not possess.

Meanwhile, the faithful Oxford band began to increase in numbers. In 1735, it was reinforced by the addition of a member whose name was to occupy a most prominent place in the future revival. George Whitefield was a poor student who maintained himself at the University by waiting on his fellows. The reading of the "Imitation" had already taken great effect on his mind, and had led him into habits of asceticism of the severest kind. Consequently, he was fully prepared to sympathize with Wesley and his companions; in him they realized the powerful auxiliary of an ardent and profoundly serious spirit. He was willing to lie at their feet, and adopted all their rules, sometimes exceeding them in the rigidity of his self-discipline.

A storm of persecution soon burst upon the infant society. Indifference and infidelity were rife at the University, and were not slow to take offence at the progress of this valiant band of youth, valiant because devoted to the pursuit of truth. Often had they to endure the ridicule of the bystanders as they repaired to St. Mary's Church to receive the Eucharist. None took their part;

the professors blamed them for extravagance. The authorities even entertained the idea of prohibiting the assemblies of "the Holy Club." It was not surprising therefore that, repulsed on all sides, its members in some instances fell away, and that its number, which at one time exceeded five-and-twenty, was reduced to five. This was a painful disappointment for Wesley, who was beginning to believe that to labour for the revival of pure religion among the future pastors of the Church might be his special vocation. Under this conviction he had indeed already refused the charge of a parish. But he was not discouraged, and, with the assistance of his brother, he persevered in his work. The strength of his convictions raised him above fear: he braved ridicule with perfect composure, especially when religious interests rendered it his duty. Actuated by the same spirit, he lived far more frugally than was customary for a man in his position, in order that he might avoid all needless expense and have wherewith to relieve the necessitous. Hence also, to save the expense of coaching, he was accustomed to perform his journeys on foot, walking sometimes hundreds of miles, and thus unconsciously preparing himself for his future labours.

While this self-renouncing spirit is worthy of all praise, the same cannot be affirmed of the bodily privations to which Wesley continued to subject himself. These, added to his vigorous physical and mental activity, seriously injured his health. He fell into a state of great weakness, and began to expectorate blood. One night he broke a blood-vessel, and thought his hour was come. "Lord," said he, "prepare me for Thy coming, and then come when Thou wilt!" But the vigour of his constitution enabled him to rally, and he recovered his health, thanks to the care of an able physician. He immediately resumed his work with a deepened conviction of the shortness of life.

Wesley had not yet found the light. His correspondence

shows him swayed alternately by hope and fear, and knowing not where to cast anchor. At this stage of his progress, he unfortunately confounded justification with sanctification, and sought to obtain by the works of the law that which is the fruit of faith alone. He laboured to be holy, humble, devoted; and yet he failed, because he had not been regenerated by the Holy Ghost. His ideas on this great subject were confused and self-contradictory. More than fifteen years had been spent at Oxford in meditation and study, and yet he had not obtained possession of the chief good.

This inward peace, which he had failed to find at the University, he was now about to seek in the activities of the mission-field.

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## CHAPTER III.

### *MISSION TO AMERICA.*

1735—1737.

WESLEY was by no means wishful to sever himself from his Oxford life; its very austerity charmed him; he felt himself drawn as by a special vocation to the work in which he was engaged of reviving pure religion among the students. That was, indeed, a parish worthy of his toil. So deeply was he impressed with its importance, that, when his father proposed that he should become his curate, he felt bound to decline his offer; and, on his death, which happened in April, 1735, he refused to become his successor, although urged to do so by the whole family.\* The care of a parish of less than two thousand inhabitants at that time daunted the man who a few years later exclaimed, "The world is my parish." This was no proof, however,

\* With the exception of his mother.—TR.

of pusillanimity: it arose from sincere distrust of himself and of his own powers. This is manifest enough from the fact that, a few weeks after having rejected these offers, he felt himself called to undertake work vastly different from that of a small country parish. The moment he believed himself directed by Providence to do so, he broke all the ties that bound him to the spot he loved, in simple obedience to the voice of God.

About three years before this, a new colony had been planted in North America, on the borders of the river Savannah. Private enterprise had been seconded by Government aid, and the colony, surnamed Georgia, was rapidly progressing. The Company that had the management of it in the first instance, desired to place this enterprise upon a Christian footing, and were now in quest of a few pious and zealous young clergymen who might be willing to devote themselves to the evangelization both of colonists and Indians. The young Methodist students at Oxford appeared to be exactly adapted to such an undertaking. The first overtures on this subject Wesley, however, declined, objecting to leave his widowed mother, of whom he was now the principal support. On being pressed still further, he gave his consent, on condition that his mother gave hers. The latter, always ready for the loftiest self-sacrifice, exclaimed, "If I had twenty sons, I should rejoice that they were all so employed, though I should never see them more."

On the 14th of October, 1735, the two Wesleys accompanied by their two friends, Charles Delamotte and Benjamin Ingham, left London for Gravesend to embark for Georgia. They found on board the vessel a hundred and twenty-four emigrants; and among these were twenty-six Moravians, accompanied by their bishop, David Nitschman. From the first, Wesley felt himself strongly attracted toward these excellent Christians, who were to exert so



powerful an influence on his religious character. With characteristic ardour, he immediately set himself to learn German, that he might be able to converse with them in their own tongue.

A voyage to America in those days occupied many months. Scarcely were they settled in their floating habitation, when Wesley and his three companions resolved to practise their principles of self-mortification on an extended scale. "Believing," writes he in his Journal, "the denying ourselves, even in the smallest instances, might, by the blessing of God, be helpful to us, we wholly left off the use of flesh and wine, and confined ourselves to vegetable food,—chiefly rice and biscuit." A few days later, he adds, "Finding nature did not require so frequent supplies as we had been accustomed to, we agreed to leave off suppers." One night, having been obliged to sleep on the floor, in consequence of the storm having drenched his bed, Wesley found that there was nothing in this which a man in health could not easily support, and concluded that in future he should "not find it needful to go to bed (as it is called) any more." These were errors truly to be pitied, yet not to be wondered at, in men smitten with genuine desires for holiness, but seeking it in the gloomy pathway of their own righteousness.

Bent on buying up every moment of time, Wesley and his friends regulated all their movements with the rigour of military discipline. Rising before four in the morning, they devoted an hour to private prayer. From five to seven they studied the Bible together, carefully comparing it with the writings of the Christian Fathers. At eight, after a frugal breakfast, they conducted public worship, to which all the passengers were invited. From nine to twelve, Wesley learned German, his brother wrote sermons, Delamotte studied Greek, and Ingham instructed the children. At twelve, they conversed freely on their plans.

The afternoon was spent in humble efforts to do good among the passengers, with whom the young missionaries conversed or read devotional works. Prayers were read again at four o'clock. The evening was occupied also in reading and conversation; and when, after a day so well filled, they retired to their hard-earned repose, "neither the roaring of the sea, nor the motion of the ship, could take away the refreshing sleep which God gave them."

In their self-imposed privations, these young men appear rather as the disciples of à Kempis and St. Bernard than of Jesus Christ. We see the same struggle to mortify the flesh by discipline and self-denial, and to inure the mind to habits of meditation, as we have already noticed in the society at Oxford. But we discern also a nobler desire awakening within them, that of devoting a large portion of their time to the work of evangelization. It is here we discover a most precious corrective to their temporary failings.

The voyage was long and painful: on several occasions, storms threatened to engulf the vessel that bore them. In these hours of danger, the panic was general: Wesley himself was not free from fear; he trembled at the approach of death, and was ashamed to find his faith insufficient to support him in the hour of need. The calm and tranquil attitude of the Moravians contrasted remarkably with that of the other passengers, and excited his astonishment. From the moment of their embarkation he had marked their deep piety: he had always seen them humble, willing to perform the most humiliating services for the other passengers, and ready to endure patiently all kinds of insult. But their attitude in the prospect of immediate death was what surprised him most. One day a sudden storm arose, just as the Germans had commenced their service: the waves broke over the vessel with great violence, sweeping clean over the decks and tearing the main-

sail in pieces. Many shrieked with fright. The Moravians alone appeared unmoved, and continued their singing. Wesley afterwards asked one of them, "Were you not afraid?" He replied, "I thank God, no." "But were not your women and children?" "No; our women and children are not afraid to die." Wesley felt that this was a point he had not yet attained.

On the 6th of February, 1736, about eight in the morning, they first set foot on American ground. Like Christopher Columbus, on his first landing on the shores of the New World, Wesley fell on his knees; and it may well be said that, little as the great explorer of the fifteenth century was aware of the magnitude of his discovery, still less was the great missionary of the eighteenth aware of the magnitude of the work his followers were to accomplish on the continent which now lay before him.

The day after his arrival, he made the acquaintance of a Moravian pastor. Full of confidence in all that bore the sanction of a community he had already learned to reverence, he asked directions respecting the work in which he was about to be engaged. "My brother," said the Moravian, "I must first ask you one or two questions. Have you the witness within yourself? Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit, that you are a child of God?" More accustomed to teach than to be taught, Wesley was surprised at these plain questions, and "knew not what to answer." Perceiving his embarrassment, his new friend continued, "Do you know Jesus Christ?" Wesley replied, "I know He is the Saviour of the world." "True," said he, "but do you know He has saved you?" "I hope He has died to save me." Spangenberg added one more question, "Do you know yourself?" Wesley answered, "I do;" but he adds, "I fear they were vain words." The Moravian pastor then related his personal experience and conversion: the recital made

a deep impression on the young missionary, and convinced him still more clearly that there was something wanting.

These impressions were deepened yet more by his continuous intercourse with these good Germans. Lodging with Delamotte under their roof, he could not but admire their purity of life. "They were," says he, "always employed, always cheerful themselves, and in good humour with one another; they had put away all anger, and strife, and wrath, and bitterness, and clamour, and evil speaking; they walked worthy of the vocation wherewith they were called, and adorned the Gospel of our Lord in all things." His deep-rooted ecclesiastical prejudices insensibly wore away in communion with these Christians. He was present one day at one of their church-meetings when, after several hours spent in conference and prayer, they proceeded to the election and ordination of a bishop. The *quondam* Oxford student was struck with the solemnity and simplicity of this service, contrasting so strongly with the ceremonial adopted on such an occasion by the Anglican Church. "The great simplicity, as well as solemnity, of the whole," he says, "almost made me forget the seventeen hundred years between, and imagine myself in one of those assemblies where form and state were not; but Paul the tent-maker, or Peter the fisherman, presided; yet with the demonstration of the Spirit and of power."

Wesley had promised to devote special attention to the evangelization of the Indians. He was anxious, therefore, to gain access to them immediately; but numerous obstacles lay in the way of his designs. He learned by experience that the neighbourhood of a civilized community was in itself a formidable hindrance to the conversion of the Pagans. On the other hand, he was not his own master, and the governor of the colony did not wish him to absent himself from the European settlement in order to follow the

Indians to their rude encampments. He strove, however, to benefit them as far as it was in his power to do so, hoping that circumstances would one day permit him to devote his whole strength to such work. For the present, the settlers demanded assiduous pastoral attention, and the missionaries therefore felt bound to begin with them.

Wesley's journal shows with what ardour he threw himself into this work. At Savannah as at Oxford, it was the little ones who claimed his most earnest efforts : the poor, the sick, and the young were the objects of his special care. He was also deeply interested in the slaves, who were even at that time numerous in America ; and he strove to improve their condition. The remarkable gift for languages which he possessed was useful to him amid the crowd of emigrants brought hither from all quarters of the globe. His recent studies in German enabled him to address a few familiar discourses to some poor emigrants, who would otherwise have been cut off from all the means of grace. At the urgent request of some French settlers at Savannah, he conducted religious services in their language. Several Vaudois from Piedmont asked him to give them an Italian service, which he also consented to try. Lastly, as a further proof of his abilities as a linguist and zeal as a missionary, he began to study Spanish, in order that he might converse with his "Jewish parishioners, some of whom," said he, "seem nearer the mind that was in Christ than many of those who call Him Lord."

As at Oxford, Wesley endeavoured to gather the few pious persons he met with into little societies, which assembled once or twice a week, in order that the members might examine themselves, and mutually instruct and exhort one another. It is observable that these small gatherings, which afterwards played so important a part in the organization of which he was the founder, were a spiritual necessity to himself before they became

so important an element in the vast ecclesiastical organization that bears his name.

Besides the influence the missionary exerted on the little circle which he thus gathered round him, he wielded a wider though less deep influence on a large portion of the population of the colony. The purity of his character did more than even his talents to gain for him their confidence and respect. Multitudes flocked to his preaching, which had a powerful effect.

One day he complained from the pulpit of the inconsistency of coming to church in a costume more becoming some worldly festival: from that day his hearers gave him no occasion to find fault with them, but appeared at public worship in more modest attire. One evening, one of the principal families in the town had determined to give a ball at the same hour as Wesley was holding his service: the result was awaited with some anxiety, but the reputation of the pastor carried it over the attractions of the ball: the latter was deserted, while the church was full.

This popularity, however, was not to last long. Influenced by his extreme ecclesiastical views, Wesley irritated his parishioners by certain disciplinary regulations. Wishful to revive the ancient customs of the Church, he refused, for instance, to baptize otherwise than by immersion. He refused also to recognise the validity of baptism performed by any minister who had not received episcopal ordination, and even went so far as to repel from the Lord's table persons truly pious, because "their baptism was invalid." Besides this excessive ritualism, the continued asceticism of Wesley and his friends gave umbrage to the people.

Although it be true that Wesley thus inflicted on his parishioners some real grievances, it must be said that the principal cause of the violent opposition he experienced was, that enmity to the Gospel which finds congenial soil in

the heart of man, and especially in a community composed of such heterogeneous elements as a colony of emigrants and adventurers of every class. After a few months, the enthusiasm of the crowd gave place to indifference, and that was soon succeeded by open hostility. Wesley believed it his duty to refuse to admit to the Lord's table a young lady connected with the family of the chief magistrate at Savannah; whereupon the opposition assumed so formidable a character, that he saw it to be impossible to continue his ministry in the colony, and was compelled to return to England. This was in December, 1737. Fifteen months before this, his brother Charles had also found it necessary to leave.

Thus ended in humiliating defeat this missionary campaign, undertaken with such enthusiasm and under such favourable auspices. This trial was necessary, however, to the development of Wesley's character. It showed him the weak foundation on which his piety rested. It overturned the structure which had been so laboriously reared thereupon; but from these ruins there was to rise another and more durable edifice, capable of outlasting every storm.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### *CONVERSION.*

1738.

THE weeks Wesley spent on board the vessel that brought him back to England, were to him of the highest value. While occupied, as in his former voyage, in promoting the spiritual interests of his fellow-passengers, his own condition was the subject of deepest anxiety. His journal is full of sad confessions, which bear no trace of the peace which

springs from simple faith. "I went to America," he says, "to convert the Indians; but O! who shall convert me? Who, what is he that will deliver me from this evil heart of unbelief? I have a fair summer religion: I can talk well; nay, and believe myself, while no danger is near; but let death look me in the face, and my spirit is troubled. Nor can I say, 'To die is gain.' . . . O! who will deliver me from this fear of death? What shall I do? Where shall I fly from it?"

Five days later he writes, "It is now two years and almost four months since I left my native country, in order to teach the Georgian Indians the nature of Christianity; but what have I learned myself in the mean time? Why, (what I the least of all suspected,) that I who went to America to convert others, was never myself converted to God. . . . This, then, have I learned in the ends of the earth—That I 'am fallen short of the glory of God:' that my whole heart is 'altogether corrupt and abominable;' and, consequently, my whole life; (seeing it cannot be, that an 'evil tree' should 'bring forth good fruit:') that, 'alienated' as I am from the life of God, I am 'a child of wrath,' an heir of hell: that my own works, my own sufferings, my own righteousness, are so far from reconciling me to an offended God, so far from making any atonement for the least of those sins which 'are more in number than the hairs of my head,' that the most specious of them need an atonement themselves, or they cannot abide His righteous judgment: that, 'having the sentence of death' in my heart, and having nothing in or of myself to plead, I have no hope, but that of being justified freely 'through the redemption that is in Jesus:' I have no hope, but that if I seek I shall find Christ, and 'be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.'"

From these quotations, which it would be easy to mul-



tiply, we see that Wesley returned from America discouraged and depressed: he had at last learned to know himself, and with a bitter eloquence he describes in his journal this phase of his spiritual life. From these few melancholy lines we may well understand the intense agony of his inward conflicts. So true is it that while oftentimes the truth flashes suddenly upon the ignorant and simple, in the case of a learned and scientific man it has first to penetrate a thick veil of prejudice.

It was impossible, however, that God should long leave in darkness a soul that so diligently sought Him. The Moravians were again the instruments employed in bringing about the decisive change which made him a new man in Christ Jesus. It was very shortly after his return from America that Wesley was thrown into the company of several of these excellent Christians, who were humbly labouring at the work of gathering small societies from among the seriously-disposed persons with whom they came in contact. These societies were real centres of religious life, and were especially adapted to Wesley's spiritual state. He immediately connected himself with them, and it was thus that he became acquainted with a Moravian brother, who was destined to lead him into the way of salvation. Peter Böhler had just arrived from Germany: his simple and practical piety, combined with his knowledge of the Scriptures, well qualified him for the important service which God designed he should render to Wesley at this crisis. Their acquaintance commenced on the 7th of February, 1738, "a day much to be remembered," as Wesley truly says. From this day forward, his interviews with this distinguished Christian became frequent; and in them he sat at his feet with the humility of a little child. The Oxford theologian laid all his difficulties before his new friend, who replied to him in Latin,—the language in which they conversed,—*Mi frater, mi frater, excoquenda est*

*ista tua philosophia.* "My brother, my brother, that philosophy of yours must be purged away." He did purge it away, and so completely, that he soon arrived at the conviction that he had been hitherto mistaken respecting the nature of true faith, supposing it to be a merely intellectual assent to revealed truth. His friend taught him that, wherever this living faith exists, it produces happiness and holiness, and that this faith itself is nothing else but "a sure trust and confidence that a man hath in God, that through the merits of Christ his sins are forgiven, and he reconciled to the favour of God." These ideas were new to Wesley, and raised certain objections in his mind; but Böhler, who did not wish him to trust to statements of his own, referred him to the Scriptures. Wesley began the Greek Testament again, resolving to abide by the law and the testimony: here he found strong corroboration of his friend's teachings; his objections vanished one by one before such declarations as, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God;" "He that believeth hath the witness in himself;" "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin." But he "could not understand how this faith should be given in a moment," and how conversion could be instantaneous. These doubts, however, were dispelled by a conscientious study of the Scriptures, and by conversation with the Moravians, who testified how, in their own individual souls, the sense of condemnation had been exchanged in a moment for peace and joy through believing.

Hitherto, Wesley had only possessed the faith of a servant: he had not yet the faith of a son. Oppressed by a sense of this defect, he wished to leave off preaching. Böhler strongly dissuaded him from such a course, and said, "Preach faith till you have it; and then, because you have it, you will preach faith." This he did henceforward with the greatest fidelity, not merely from the pulpit but

in every-day life, in his travels, at the inns at which he stayed, and in fact wherever opportunity offered. In proportion as the sense of his necessities deepened, he was led to disuse the forms of prayer which he had generally employed in his private devotions, and to pray more at large. At the same time, perceiving the many advantages of Christian fellowship, he fully identified himself with the little society that met in Fetter Lane, and which by the advice of Böhler was organised on May 1st, 1738, according to the rules of the Moravian brotherhood. The members were to meet once a week, "to confess their faults one to another, and to pray one for another, in obedience to the command of God given by St. James."

Wesley sought with great ardour that internal deliverance from sin, the importance of which he now fully understood. The following entry occurs in a letter to a friend about this time. "Yet I hear a voice (and is it not the voice of God ?) saying, 'Believe, and thou shalt be saved. He that believeth, is passed from death unto life.' . . . . O thou Saviour of men, save us from trusting in anything but Thee! Draw us after Thee! Let us be emptied of ourselves, and then fill us with all peace and joy in believing; and let nothing separate us from Thy love, in time or in eternity."

"This gift," he continues, "I resolved to seek unto the end, 1.—By absolutely renouncing all dependence, in whole or in part, upon *my own* works or righteousness; on which I had really grounded my hope of salvation, though I knew it not, from my youth up. 2.—By adding to the constant use of all the other means of grace, continual prayer for this very thing, justifying, saving faith, a full reliance on the blood of Christ shed for *me*; a trust in Him as *my* Christ, as *my* sole justification, sanctification, and redemption."

The day of deliverance dawned at last: Wesley thus

describes it in his own words: "I continued thus to seek it, (though with strange indifference, dulness, and coldness, and unusually frequent relapses into sin,) till Wednesday, May 24. I think it was about five this morning, that I opened my Testament on these words, 'There are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, even that ye should be partakers of the Divine nature.' (2 Peter i. 4.) Just as I went out, I opened it again on these words, 'Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.' In the afternoon, I was asked to go to St. Paul's. The anthem was, 'Out of the deep have I called unto Thee, O Lord: Lord, hear my voice. O let Thine ears consider well the voice of my complaint. If Thou, Lord, wilt be extreme to mark what is done amiss, O Lord, who may abide it? For there is mercy with Thee; therefore shalt Thou be feared. O Israel, trust in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption. And He shall redeem Israel from all his sins.' In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate-Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me, that He had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.

"I began to pray with all my might for those who had in a more especial manner despitefully used me and persecuted me. I then testified openly to all there, what I now first felt in my heart. But it was not long before the enemy suggested, 'This cannot be faith; for where is thy joy?' Then was I taught, that peace and victory over sin are essential to faith in the Captain of our salvation: but that, as to the transports of joy that usually attend the

beginning of it, especially in those who have mourned deeply, God sometimes giveth, sometimes withholdeth them, according to the counsels of His own will."

From this time Wesley, though still called to endure many inward conflicts, held fast the blessed witness vouchsafed to him. Possessed at length of the pearl of great price which it had cost him so many struggles to obtain, he employed his whole life in proclaiming and recommending it to all around.

"Let us glance at Wesley's internal development at the epoch he had now reached. He began by following a course of outward righteousness; but he soon found that the seat of religion is in the heart, and he diligently pursued inward holiness. Then it was that he saw the boundlessness of the requirements of the Divine law, and perceived that nothing could satisfy them but that perfect holiness which consists in a complete conformity, inward and outward, to the mind of Christ. But his efforts after its attainment brought neither assurance of salvation nor real happiness. What he lacked was a starting point from which to proceed, and an immovable foundation on which to rest. Next he learned that this solid foundation is not within but without; that it consists in the grace of God in Christ, and that faith is the only means by which we can be established upon it. In Wesley we see the same internal conflict, the same transition from the works of the law to faith, as we see in Luther. And this emancipation from the bondage of the law, this deliverance of the soul striving after the assurance of salvation and the joy of faith, is neither a delusion nor a fanatical enthusiasm, as it has often been called by those who have wished to hold up Wesley to contempt. It is the forth-putting of the long-concealed shoot, when at length it bursts its sheath. The soul, at last delivered from the yoke of the law and the bondage of sin, receives the assurance of salvation and the joy of faith;

for, as Luther says, where the pardon of sin takes place, there follow life and peace."\*

Charles Wesley had already reached the same goal as his brother, and by a similar route. Three days earlier, he had found the assurance of pardon at the foot of the Cross. George Whitefield, their old Oxford friend, had preceded them in the same path: while they were in Georgia seeking salvation by their own works, he had already become a new man. Thus were providentially prepared for their sacred work the three principal labourers in the great awakening which was about to overspread England.

Wesley was deeply indebted to the Moravians for having introduced him to a Christianity vastly superior in living energy to that he had hitherto known. This Church appeared to him to have understood, better than any other, the vital and practical character of Christian truth; and he loved it with filial affection. At the decisive epoch in his spiritual life which he had now reached, he thought the time was come for him to realize a project that he had formed in Georgia, of visiting the home of that Christian community, in order that he might become better acquainted with it. This journey, which partook of the character of a religious pilgrimage and an act of filial devotion, he now accordingly undertook in company with several friends.

At Ysselstein, near Rotterdam, he found a small colony of Moravians, established on the territory of the Dowager Princess of Orange, and spent some agreeable hours under the roof of the pious Baron de Watteville. At Marienborn, near Frankfort, he met Count Zinzendorf, whom he had long wished to see. His conversations with this eminent Christian were useful and agreeable. "And here," says he, "I continually met with what I sought for, viz., living proofs

\* C. H. Schöll, article "Methodism," in the *Real-Encyclopædie* of Dr. Herzog, vol. ix.

of the power of faith: persons saved from inward as well as outward sin, by 'the love of God shed abroad in their hearts,' and from all doubt and fear by the abiding witness of 'the Holy Ghost given unto them.'"

After spending twelve days in the little colony at Marienborn, Wesley resumed his journey to Herrnhuth, the seat of the principal Moravian community. He traversed a considerable part of Germany on foot, and at length, on the 1st of August, 1738, arrived at this celebrated village, situated on the borders of Bohemia, which occupies a loftier place in Church history than many cities of renown. Here he saw in full activity a form of Christianity strongly contrasting with the Anglican, which alone he had hitherto known. Already connected by spiritual ties with the Moravian Church, he studied it closely and with deep sympathy, a sympathy indeed that may have hindered him for the time from forming an independent judgment on some of the less commendable aspects of this secluded community. Writing to his brother Samuel, he says, "God has given me at length the desire of my heart. I am with a Church whose conversation is in heaven, in whom is the mind of Christ, and who walk as He walked. As they have all one Lord and one faith, so they are all partakers of one spirit, the spirit of meekness and love, which uniformly and continually animates all their conversation. O how high and holy a thing Christianity is, and how widely distant from that which is so called, though it neither purifies the heart nor renews the life after the image of our blessed Redeemer!"

By his intercourse with the Moravians, Wesley was confirmed in the doctrine of justification by faith which he had learned from Böhler. The spectacle of a Church living according to this doctrine, so much neglected in his own country, convinced him of its practical efficacy. Few men were more useful to him than the pious Christian David, at

once both artisan and pastor, who had with his own hands built the first houses in the colony, and whose preaching and example had largely contributed to its spiritual edification. His conversation and discourses brought fresh light to Wesley's mind. Intercourse with such Christians, at the very commencement of his new life, could not but exert the happiest influence on his religious character and ministerial usefulness. From them he learned the power of living faith, and how it produces in the soul ardent love to the Saviour and to all Christians, and a total renunciation of the world and self.

What particularly impressed him at Herrnhuth, was the actual realization of a society pervaded by a truly Christian spirit. Everything was not equally commendable no doubt, but how many things there were to be found worthy of the highest eulogiums! "I would gladly," says he, "have spent my life here; but my Master calling me to labour in other parts of His vineyard, I was constrained to take my leave of this happy place." He quitted it with regret, carrying home with him lessons and reminiscences, which afterwards became extremely useful. In fact, it would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of this visit on Wesley's religious and ecclesiastical progress. The "city of God" which he had beheld in the heart of Germany, he was destined to reproduce in England, with such differences as were rendered necessary by the difference between a nation of an essentially reflective disposition and a nation endowed with an active and enterprising spirit.

"Methodism," says an historian, "owes to Moravianism special obligations. First, it introduced Wesley into that regenerated spiritual life, the supremacy of which over all ecclesiasticism and dogmatism, it was the appointed mission of Methodism to re-assert and promote in the Protestant world. Secondly, Wesley derived from it some of his clearest conceptions of the theological ideas which he was



to propagate as essentially related to this spiritual life; and he now returned from Herrnhuth, not only confirmed in his new religious experience, but in these most important doctrinal views. Thirdly, Zinzendorf's communities were based upon Spener's plan of reforming the Established Churches, by forming 'little churches within them,' in despair of maintaining spiritual life among them otherwise; Wesley thus organized Methodism within the Anglican Church. And, fourthly, not only in this general analogy, but in many details of his discipline, can we trace the influence of Moravianism." \*

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## CHAPTER V.

### *MORAL AND RELIGIOUS CONDITION OF ENGLAND AT THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.*

WE have been contemplating the providential preparation of the man whom God was about to call to the work of awakening the dormant religious life of England. Before entering upon the history of that work, it is desirable that we should show its necessity, by glancing at the moral and religious state of the country at the time when Wesley and his friends commenced their labours. This is a subject that deserves a detailed examination.

The main fault of English Protestantism was, its too limited acceptance of the principles of the Reformation. The progress of the movement was checked in consequence of the political events that accompanied its birth. One of

\* Stevens, *History of Methodism*, vol. i., page 108, American edition.

the greatest evils was that it owed its existence in part to the passions of Henry VIII. Scarcely had it escaped the hands of this so-called Reformer, when it fell into those of Mary; and its most illustrious defenders, Cranmer, Latimer, Hooper, and Ridley, perished in the flames. In the reign of Elizabeth it revived, but only to be bound up with the State, and to accept chains more degrading than those of persecution. It is not our business to relate the chequered features of its history under James I., Charles I., the Republic, and the two disastrous reigns that succeeded the Restoration.

Thus the English Reformation, nourished and brought up in the arms of the political power which more than once threatened to strangle it, was wanting in that spirit of independence which would have formed its strongest security. Instead of a radical revolution, it became a timid compromise with the past. It retained an hierarchical organization founded on the Roman-Catholic system, and preserved some traces of the same even in its doctrines. The reformed clergy who, to have been equal to the needs of the age, should have been apostles, did not by any means reach the level of their duty. With a few exceptions, they were in a state of total ignorance; a great number of ministers, in the reign of Elizabeth, were unable to read. Their temporal condition was pitiable: during the week, according to Southey, they were obliged to turn tailors, joiners, waiters, or even, according to Macaulay, farm-labourers and swine-herds, too happy when the servants of the great houses regaled them with cold meat and beer. Their moral and religious state was equally deplorable: to a notorious incapacity for their work they added a total lack of piety. Their numbers also were so insufficient that in many parishes it was the sexton who officiated. Such was for the most part the condition of the clergy, whose mission it was to instil the principles of the Reformation

into the minds of the English people. It may easily be seen, therefore, how it was that this movement failed to effect the spiritual transformation of the country.

Puritanism was undoubtedly the protest raised by a multitude of honest and devoted men against an inefficient Reformation based on political power. But, besides that this movement did not pervade the masses, it must be remembered that it very quickly degenerated. Though for a long time a school of virtue and manly piety, it soon lost its true character by becoming involved in political struggles, and it is certain that the majority of the churches to which it gave birth were, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, in a scarcely less torpid condition than the Establishment itself. These imperfections in the English Reformation were among the most powerful causes of the moral and spiritual prostration which we shall find to have characterized the whole nation during the first half of the eighteenth century. The political changes which agitated the nation throughout the preceding century, largely contributed to the same result. Nothing corrupts the morals and principles of a people so much as the spectacle of frequent revolutions.

Few epochs appear, at first sight, so flourishing as the eighteenth century in England. Abroad, the English arms gained brilliant victories under Marlborough: at home, literature was adorned by such men as Johnson, Addison, Swift, Pope, Young, Gray, and a crowd of talented authors; while science took great strides, thanks to the genius of Isaac Newton. But if, passing by these external appearances, we penetrate to the vitals of society, we shall discover that they were full of hideous sores, and that, if God had not interposed, the whole body must have perished.

All impartial historians agree in painting the moral condition of England at this period in the most sombre colours. The aristocracy were sunk in the deepest degradation, and

the evil example was set by those who occupied the highest places in the land. The royal family itself was far from irreproachable: the court overflowed with gaming and debauchery: the private vices of George I. and George II. exerted the most baneful influence upon the nation. The prestige of royalty was on the wane, and when Montesquieu visited England in 1729, he remarked, "The king's influence daily diminishes."

The nobility, following such an example, regarded vice with revolting indifference. The records of those times are full of revelations which would be incredible, were they not attested by the best authorities. Corruption disgraced every department of the ecclesiastical system. The Duke of Marlborough, the greatest general of the age, sold himself to every party in turn, and even to all parties at once, receiving money from William of Orange to betray James II., then from James II. to betray William of Orange, and carrying on all the while covert intrigues with the enemies of his country. The most eminent men in the land, Russell, Bolingbroke, Shrewsbury, Halifax, were very little better: they wavered between the Stuarts and the house of Hanover, made no scruple of securing two masters and receiving bribes from both; violated their oaths without shame, plotted treason without remorse, and succeeded, in spite of these enormities, in making their way in the world. Robert Walpole, who was prime minister for fifteen years, evinced an equally lax tone of morality: he used to boast that he could buy any man's conscience, and he fixed a high price upon his own. It was owing to him that the Treasury chambers became a veritable mart, to which every member of Parliament repaired, to barter away his vote. By well-placed bribery, the ministry commanded imposing majorities; and the House of Commons yielded implicit obedience to its will.

The passion for money turned many heads; so that peers, ministers, and the Prince of Wales himself, were

involved in fraudulent speculations by which they were at once dishonoured and enriched. Montesquieu, even though coming from France, where the greatest evils prevailed, was scandalized, and wrote, "Money is here all-powerful: honour and virtue are little regarded."

Such facts, which it would be easy to multiply, prove that the influential classes set bad examples to the people, examples that were but too faithfully followed. The fashionable life of London was as corrupt as that of Versailles, and it lacked the external decency with which French politeness veiled its irregularities: vice here was accompanied by revolting brutality. Debauchery and drunkenness were widely prevalent; and those who indulged in such practices, gloried in their shame. "It was no uncommon thing," says Addison, "for a man who had got drunk in good company, or who had spent the night in dissipation, to relate his adventures the next morning before ladies for whom he entertained the greatest respect." \* Women who could endure such conversation afford us but a poor idea of their own morality, and, as a matter of fact, it was far from what it should have been. But what other results could be expected from such training as they received in homes disgraced by a most deplorable laxity,—at the theatre which Samuel Wesley brands as "infamous," and where the imagination and the heart were polluted by the grossest obscenities,—from the literature of the day, which delighted in picturing licentious scenes,—and even at church, where it was a mark of good breeding to display the utmost inattention to the dreary morality which formed the staple of the discourse?

The upper classes had, in fact, lost all regard for religion; and there was nothing to arrest them as they neared the brink of ruin. Montesquieu again observes: "There

\* Montesquieu, *Notes sur l'Angleterre*.

is no religion in England; four or five members of the House of Commons attend the daily prayers. If one speaks of religion, everybody begins to laugh. When a man said in my presence, 'I believe this as I believe the creed,' everybody burst out laughing." \* Comparing the religious state of England with that of France, Montesquieu said, "In France I am thought to have too little religion, but in England to have too much."

In perfect accordance with this is the following testimony from Samuel Wesley, rector of Epworth, who little thought, while he was depicting in such sombre colours the religious condition of the country, that two of his sons, as yet unborn, would contribute most largely to its reformation. "It is considered," says he, "to be the mark of good breeding, or at least a proof of discernment and spirit, to turn everything sacred into ridicule, and to profane the glorious and dreadful name of God; and, on the other hand, we find that nothing is more disobliging and dishonourable than to reprove, unmask, and suppress such abuses.†"

Infidelity was, indeed, a fashion and almost a mania among the English aristocracy. It had its writers who catered to its taste, such as Lord Bolingbroke, the friend of Voltaire, called by M. Taine "a jeering sceptic, and a buyer and seller of consciences, marriages, and vows," and by Johnson, "a buffoon who loaded a popgun against Christianity, and a coward who paid another person half-a-crown to let it off;" Collins, who carried his zeal against Christianity to the extreme of unfairness, forging imaginary texts and making false quotations; Tindal, whose infidel pamphlets were so atrocious that Parliament, usually lax enough, ordered them to be burnt by the common hangman; Toland, whose writings met with the same fate, called by Swift a "miserable sophist," and who, in his rage against

\* Montesquieu, *Pensées diverses*.

† Sermon before the Society for the Reformation of Manners.

the Gospel, visited the taverns and public places, decrying its doctrines and mysteries, till he was reduced to poverty and compelled to beg his bread from door to door.

This profound degradation of the better instructed portion of English society, is recognized by all historians; and when we contemplate the aristocracy of the England of to-day, comparatively so enlightened and so religious, and mark its beneficial influence on the general progress of the nation, we are led to the conclusion that the religious reformation of the eighteenth century must have been most thorough in order to accomplish such a change.

Unhappily, the people too readily copied the vices of the great. The English people in the eighteenth century were fearfully degraded, especially in the large towns. The revolutions through which they had passed had engendered a strange proneness to disorder and intolerance of discipline. Ignorant, like the rest of the lower classes in Europe generally at this epoch, they obeyed in turn the most capricious impulses, now rising in support of the Whigs, and then lending countenance to the Tories. Every opportunity for uproar and stone-throwing was eagerly seized, and the streets of London and of the large towns continually witnessed scenes of disorder which the authorities never attempted to check. Parliamentary struggles often had their counterparts in the streets, with stones and fists for arguments. The populace had two deep-rooted antipathies which they never cared to conceal; the one against the Papists, and the other against the Dissenters. On the occasion of Dr. Sacheverell's trial for preaching a sermon against the Government in 1710, there was a formidable riot; and the populace showed their sympathy with the Doctor by burning and sacking several Dissenting chapels. In 1780, another riot took place, when "No Popery" was the cry: the mob demolished the prisons and released the

prisoners, and for three days ruled the metropolis, burning, pillaging, and massacring everywhere. "Barrels of gin were broken open in such numbers as to flood the streets with their contents. Women and children went down on their knees and drank themselves to death. Some were maddened by it, others stupified; and the houses burning on every side fell and buried them in their ruins." The coronation of George I. was celebrated in various parts of England by hostile demonstrations: here the health of the Pretender was drunk, there the King was burned in effigy: in one place the Dissenting chapels were destroyed; in another, the passengers were insulted who refused to join in the cry, "King James for ever!" On the other hand, there were mobs that burnt in effigy the Pope and the Pretender, and fought pitched battles with the Jacobites. More than once, blood flowed in the public places.

"Even when party strifes ceased to rage," says M. De Witt, "the turbulent and licentious youth that frequented the coffee-houses were a plague to the public. They insulted modest women and peaceably disposed persons, attacked the passers-by, and threw them into the gutter; and these were some of the more innocent amusements of the unruly subjects who, under the name of Mohawks, became the terror of London. At night, after priming themselves with drink, they sallied out into the streets sword in hand, upsetting and wounding those who had the misfortune to fall in with them. When they laid hands on a woman, they thrust her into a barrel and sent her rolling down a hill. Each band had its own favourite diversion, and its peculiar mode of torture. One set took delight in slitting the nose or knocking the eye out; another in giving people what they called a *sweating*. This game consisted in forming a circle around the victim, and pricking him with the points of their swords on all sides, so as to keep his body in constant motion as he endeavoured



to avoid them. These Bacchanalian orgies were sometimes employed to wreak vengeance of the most terrible kind.

"After sun-down, it was impossible for respectable persons to venture abroad without a strong escort. If they escaped the Mohawks, they were in danger of encountering the highwaymen. From the 20th of January to the 10th of February, 1720, there were reported in the newspapers thirty such encounters in London and its vicinity alone."

Intemperance made frightful ravages among the lower classes. "Gin was introduced in 1684, and half a century later England consumed seven millions of gallons per annum. The signs on the gin shops, by way of invitation, offered people enough to make them drunk for a penny, enough to make them dead drunk for twopence, and straw to lie upon into the bargain: when they became so intoxicated as to need the latter accommodation, they were carried into the cellar to sleep themselves sober. One could not walk the streets of London without meeting miserable creatures, lying insensible upon the pavement, whom the charity of the passers-by alone saved from being stifled in the mud or crushed beneath the wheels of the vehicles." Parliament vainly strove to interdict the sale of the liquid poison: a clandestine commerce in the article sprung up in all parts of England. If any gave information of these frauds upon the customs, the people threw them into the river; and their attitude became so menacing that the House of Commons was compelled to repeal the law.

We have dwelt the longer upon the moral condition of the large towns, and on their taste for rioting, because it was on these towns that Wesley spent much of his evangelical labours: the details we have given will show the immense difficulties he had to contend with.

The rural districts, though less demoralized, were in a state bordering on barbarism. The colliery population,

so improved in the present day, were no better than savages. Drunkenness and debauchery were everywhere rampant. Amid such degradation it is no wonder that all kinds of superstitions prevailed. Many of these were remnants of Popery, still lingering two centuries after the Reformation. The Devonshire peasantry taught their children prayers to the saints. Elsewhere, in Wales for instance, many Druidical customs were yet in force.

Old houses were popularly believed to be haunted by evil spirits: sorcerers, fortune-tellers, and adventurers of every description plied their lucrative arts in broad daylight. Few could read, and, as to writing, that was a luxury for a lord. In all justice we must add, however, that at this period the whole rural population of Europe was not more advanced.

Such was the condition of the people that Methodism was about to transform. The whole country seemed to have reached the extreme limit of degradation, which leaves a nation no alternative but utter destruction, unless it consent to commence a new life. The moral degeneracy we have just described fully justifies the statement of a modern writer, himself a Churchman, who says that England had fallen into utter paganism when Wesley appeared, and the further assertion of an impartial historian that it was not one whit less corrupt than the Lower Empire or the old French monarchy.

But was nothing done to remedy this state of things? Our answer is, Very little indeed. Let us, however, endeavour to point out some attempts at reformation that were made, previous to the Methodist revival. The literature of the age was for the most part implicated in the moral torpor of the nation: poetry, romance, and the stage were also too often effectual disseminators of corruption. There was, however, a division in the camp:

some men of great talents, such as Steele, Addison, Berkeley, and Johnson, strove to rear a barrier against the encroachments of vice. In certain periodical publications, written in a lively and satirical style, they lashed the vices and extravagances of the age with a freedom that does them credit. These productions enjoyed great popularity, and it is to their pages that we must turn for a true picture of the time. The Essayists, as they are called, did a good work, but it was only superficial: by rendering vice ridiculous they made it blush, but could not scare it away.

It is not in literature alone that we trace this salutary reaction. Toward the close of the seventeenth century an interesting movement sprang up, whose existence is sufficient to prove that a portion of the nation still withstood the progress of corruption. A few influential members of the Established Church formed themselves into a society for the purpose of repressing vice by legal measures. The movement spread, and obtained the patronage of eminent personages in the Church and in the State: Queen Mary herself belonged to it, and ordered that the ancient laws for the suppression of scandalous vice should be vigorously carried out. Thus patronized, the Society for the Reformation of Manners soon became sufficiently powerful to deal effectually with incorrigible vice: armed with all the authority of the law, it rendered the most energetic assistance to the magistracy. In London especially, it succeeded in closing hundreds of houses of ill-fame, and brought to justice multitudes of players, common swearers, drunk and disorderly persons, who were fined, imprisoned, or publicly whipped by the hangman. These severe measures so far restrained vice, that, instead of stalking at large it sought concealment; but they were powerless to amend the morals of the people. Besides, while they punished the common herd of sinners, they usually spared those of a higher grade.

De Foe wittily compares these laws to cobwebs which catch the little flies and let the big ones escape. Still, this quickening of the national conscience was a hopeful augury, and a strong protest against the debasement of morals which set in at the Restoration.

Closely allied to this good work, and indeed anticipating it by several years, was the organization of small religious societies by three pious clergymen of the Anglican Church, Horneck, Smithies, and Beveridge. A large number of young people having been converted through their instrumentality, they counselled them "to meet once a week and hold conversations that might tend to mutual edification." This they accordingly did, and in addition raised funds to be bestowed on charitable objects. They visited the sick and the prisoners, they taught the children; and it is said that by their persevering efforts a hundred schools were established in London and its vicinity. For some time these little societies were centres of zealous religious life, although their action was confined within too narrow limits. Had they possessed a more aggressive and enterprising character, they might have put forward the religious awakening of the nation by half a century. Unfortunately, they almost wholly prohibited evangelical action, properly so called, for fear of interfering with the rights of the clergy. Wesley, as we shall see, found them almost extinct, and succeeded in inspiring them with new vitality. If he availed himself, however, of Horneck's idea, it was only to develop it and make it more fruitful.

Though these religious societies did not produce a general revival of religion, yet they undoubtedly paved the way. Their existence and continuance prove the presence of genuine religious influence amid the evils that we have just described. The Anglican clergy should have encouraged and promoted this interesting movement. But, unfortunately, they were not capable of doing so, as a

glance at their religious condition will sufficiently attest.

The clergy were, indeed, vastly improved since the days when, according to Macaulay, they scarcely rose above the social level of the domestic servants of the great houses. Re-established in their benefices and richly endowed, the coffers of the clergy were replenished; and the *elite* of English youth sought fortune and honour in the posts which the Church offered them. But though their social status was improved, their moral and religious character had not advanced in an equal ratio. Having nothing to fear from a discipline that had fallen into desuetude, the clergy followed their own inclinations; and the parishes were well off when they possessed pastors in whom gross immorality was not joined to worldly indifference. Contemporary evidence is too strong for any defence to be made of these degenerate ecclesiastics. Voltaire, who visited England in 1726, states that, upon the whole, the English clergy were more moral than the French, and that, compared with a Parisian abbot "an Anglican dignitary is a Cato." But he adds, "The Anglican clergymen frequent the taverns, because custom sanctions it, and, if they get drunk, they do it seriously, and incur no disgrace." Many proofs of this are to be found in Wesley's journals.

There were to be found, indeed, among the ranks of the clergy, a few men of superior mind. Men of leisure and of learning, they were better able than others to devote themselves to literature, and to study the great political questions which were agitating the nation; but they gave to such pursuits the time and energy that belonged to their flocks. All these pamphlet-writing, novel-writing, poetising clergymen, who, like Sterne and Swift, employed their talents in composing works whose morality even was frequently doubtful, were only diverting the sick man and creating a

disgust for the powerful remedies which alone could restore him to health. We ask ourselves in sadness what kind of preaching he could offer his parishioners on the Sunday, who during the week had been writing *Gulliver* or *Tristram Shandy*. A ministry whose leisure hours were spent in the preparation of facetious or impure publications, was assuredly not equal to the task that properly belonged to it.

This general decay was not, however, everywhere equally extensive. The rise of the religious societies that we have mentioned proves the existence of pious and devoted ministers. Unfortunately, men of the class of Beveridge, Horneck, and Smithies, were comparatively rare. Most men were content to sigh in silence, too timid to take the initiative in regard to measures of amendment. They felt desires for amendment, but they only manifested them in vague and incoherent aspirations. This small minority feared obloquy too much to show any open favour to the noble imprudences of the young reformers who vainly endeavoured to interest them in their exertions. Learning and distinction of every kind were not wanting to the clergy, to whose ranks belonged such men as William Sherlock, Daniel Waterland, Bishop Butler, and Dean Prideaux. What was wanting was a comprehension of the needs of the people, and, above all, that practical and operative faith which seeks in order to save the souls of men.

In describing the clergy themselves, we have virtually described their preaching. The immense majority of ministers were content to give their audiences meagre disquisitions on morality, which they read in a cold and formal manner. Some, in the large towns particularly, courted an ephemeral popularity, by pandering to the public taste, and dressing up in sentimental phrases the easy themes of natural religion. Others, as Dr. Samuel Clarke, Bishop Hoadly, and the learned Whiston, openly

taught Deism or Arianism, and excited even the attention of Voltaire, who said of them, "The Arian party have chosen an unlucky time for their resurrection, now that the world is disgusted with sectarian disputes."

Another original mode of preaching in the last century was practised by ministers who, being involved themselves in the public questions of the day, often transformed the pulpit into a political rostrum. The following is the portrait of one of the most eminent of this class, drawn by a skilful hand: "One of the most refined ecclesiastics of the day, according to the fashion, was Robert South, a man armed cap-à-pie, a headstrong royalist and champion of divine right and passive obedience, a bitter controversialist, a calumniator of Nonconformists, and opponent of the Act of Toleration; who never disdained to vent his spleen in fierce and abusive language. No figure was too vulgar or too violent for him to use. He paints low life with all its coarse and revolting details. He dares everything, he shrinks from nothing, he is low. He is sneering and satirical, a pulpit buffoon and comedian. He paints men as he has seen them in daily life. The public will recognize the originals in the streets: the portraits only want the names." \*

The orthodox preaching, even as represented by such men as Tillotson, Bull, and Waterland, was lacking in evangelical force. Their pedantic dogmatism chilled and benumbed the hearer. The vital doctrines of the Gospel did not form the basis of their teachings. When it ceased to be truly evangelical, preaching ceased to be popular and impressive.

This decay of the Established Church had long engaged

\* Taine, *History of English Literature*. [It is only fair to remind the reader that other critics, while acknowledging serious defects, also point out great excellencies in South: Wesley himself praises his "plain, nervous style."—TR.]

the attention of serious minds, and awakened the gravest solicitude. The pious Archbishop Leighton said in his energetic way, "The Church is a fair carcase without a spirit." The eloquent lament of Bishop Burnet has often been quoted, "I am in the seventieth year of my age, and as I cannot speak long in this world in any sort, so I cannot hope for a more solemn occasion than this of speaking with all due freedom . . . . I cannot look on without the deepest concern, when I see the imminent ruin hanging over this Church." Then he speaks of the ignorance of the clergy, of their slight esteem for the Scriptures, and the general disposition to engage in party politics, and neglect the care of souls. Archbishop Secker, and Bishops Gibson and Butler pass an equally severe judgment on the Church and clergy of the day.

The Nonconformists had been preserved from so deep a declension, both by their principles and by the vigorous vein of piety which still pervaded their ranks. Those were not dead Churches that reckoned among them such men as Isaac Watts, the celebrated hymn writer, Nathaniel Lardner, the distinguished apologist, and Philip Doddridge, the author of several works full of unction and piety. Unhappily, the excitements of the contest with the Establishment, which often bore a political character, together with endless internal broils, induced a general inattention to the work of spiritual aggression. Deism and Arianism also sounded from many pulpits which should have been better fenced; and the leaders of Dissent express similar regrets to those which fell from their Episcopal brethren. Dr. Guyse says, "The religion of nature makes up the darling topics of our age; and the religion of Jesus is valued only for the sake of that, and only so far as it carries on the light of nature, and is a bare improvement of that kind of light. All that is distinctively Christian or peculiar to Christ, is waved and banished and despised." Isaac Watts, Abraham



Taylor, and John Hurrion are all agreed on this subject.

A second Reformation was necessary: but for this new work it was also necessary that God should raise up new men. There was nothing to indicate that the nation was on the eve of a great moral revolution; and Voltaire, after a brief sojourn in England, was able to say, "They are so disgusted in England with that kind of thing, that a new religion, or an old religion revived, would scarcely make its fortune." Voltaire was wrong: events soon offered a striking refutation of his statement; for at the same time that he was announcing the decline of Christianity, and predicting its overthrow, a few pious Oxford students were forming an association that was to be the cradle, if not of a "new religion," yet of an "old religion revived." Most remarkable coincidence! The two men who were destined to act more powerfully than any others upon their contemporaries, at the same moment trod the soil of Britain,\* and in view of a great nation corroded by scepticism and materialism, formed resolutions of an exactly opposite character. The one, mistaking the license of the wits for true liberty, determined to import into France the principles and methods of English infidelity; the other profoundly impressed by the evils under which his country groaned, resolved to attempt its resuscitation through the Gospel. Those who met in social intercourse the young Parisian exile with his biting wit, and the young Oxford collegian with his grave demeanour, doubted not that they looked on men who would move the age, though in opposite directions, and that their conflicting labours would create a universal commotion. For our part, judging of their work by results, we do not hesitate to say that we infinitely

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\* Voltaire's sojourn in England commenced in 1726, and lasted three years, thus coinciding exactly with the beginning of the Methodist movement at Oxford.

prefer the work of the great missionary to that of the great free-thinker; the one labouring to elevate the souls of men, the other to destroy them, the one fighting for God, the other fighting against Him. And while every day more fully discloses the pernicious character of Voltaire's work, every day demonstrates more strikingly the excellence of that performed by Wesley.

## BOOK SECOND.

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### THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE WORK.

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1738—1744.

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#### CHAPTER I.

##### *BIRTH OF THE MOVEMENT.*

1738—1739.

WESLEY returned from Germany about the middle of September, 1738. His soul was overflowing with desire to devote its energies to God, but as yet he knew not the way by which the Lord was about to lead him. He had, indeed, no preconceived plan. Having a strong faith in the Providence of God, it became his habit continually to expect indications of the course he was to follow, taking no more thought for to-morrow's labours than for to-morrow's bread, and looking to God to mete out the one as well as the other. He immediately commenced to labour with the greatest ardour, in the restricted sphere which was at this time open to him. There were still in existence in London several of the small religious societies founded by Horneck and his friends, the greater part of which, owing to the spiritual declension of the age, had been dissolved. Those which yet remained had recently been revived by the Moravians. These centres of religious life had a strong attraction for Wesley at a time when he was so deeply desirous of spiritual

progress and brotherly fellowship. Inflamed with the zeal of his first love, he by his warm exhortations contributed to the quickening of his brethren's faith.

But Wesley could not confine his zeal within the narrow limits of these small societies. He was drawn, as by an irresistible spell, toward the ignorant and degraded masses whose souls no man cared for. But people of this class rarely crossed the threshold of a church, and, in order to gain access to them, Wesley must quit the Church. He would, however, have hesitated long before coming to such a decision, had not the Anglican Church hastened it by closing her pulpits against him. On his return from Germany, he preached in many of her sanctuaries both in London and the provinces, as his episcopal ordination gave him the legal right to do. In his sermons he completely broke with the conventional custom, and, instead of dry morality, boldly announced the great evangelical doctrine of justification by faith, pressing it home upon the minds of men with the powerful earnestness which only a personal experience of salvation can inspire. This was a new thing in those days, and loud were the clamours it excited. He was charged with innovation and heresy, and threatened with expulsion from the churches if he persisted in preaching this new-fangled creed. The old charge this, always levelled in times of declension against those who would resuscitate the pristine faith; but Wesley heeded it not. Docile and devoted to the interests of the Church on all points of discipline, and so remote from Dissent that the very mention of it made his brain swim, he nevertheless refused to yield upon a point of doctrine; and boldly appealed from the Church of that degenerate age to the Church of Cranmer and Latimer, the Church of the Thirty-nine Articles. "The doctrines we preach," he exclaims, "are the doctrines of the Church of England; indeed, the fundamental doctrines of the Church. I differ in

no point from those who adhere to them ; but I differ from that part of the clergy who dissent from the Church."

One after the other, the pulpits in which Wesley had been accustomed to preach were closed against him. One day, having to preach twice in the same place, he announced at the morning service that he would conclude his subject in the afternoon ; but the clergyman, alarmed by the first sermon, interfered to prevent the second. "A good remembrance," says Wesley, "that I should, if possible, declare at every time the whole counsel of God."

Though expelled from the sanctuaries, Wesley did not slacken his activity. In his journals we see him filled with that blessed longing for the salvation of souls which became the ruling passion of his life. He regularly visited the prisoners at Newgate, and preached the Gospel to them. In this course of humble labour, he was frequently rewarded by success. In November, 1738, we find him upon the fatal scaffold in company with a condemned malefactor, who, having been converted through his instrumentality, desired him to be present with him in his last hours. A few moments before he died, on being asked, "How do you feel your heart now?" the condemned criminal replied, "I feel a peace which I could not have believed to be possible. And I know it is the peace of God, which passeth all understanding." Charles Wesley, who had accompanied his brother, addressed a few words of exhortation to the crowd ; and on the evening of the same day Wesley wrote in his journal, "O Lord God of my fathers, accept even me among them, and cast me not out from among Thy children !"

Amid these lowly evangelistic labours Wesley concluded the year 1738. At this time, the principal members of the band of Oxford students were together in London. Charles Wesley, a most zealous ally of his brother John,

like him attained the honour of expulsion from the metropolitan pulpits. Whitefield, just arrived from America, where he had been widely useful, was about to experience the same treatment.

On the first day of January, 1739, the two Wesleys, Whitefield, Ingham, Hall, and Kinchin were present at a lovefeast in Fetter Lane, with about sixty of the brethren. The year that was to witness the birth of the great Revival was commenced by them in mutual prayer. This meeting was, as Whitefield says, "a Pentecostal season indeed." Five days later they met again, to confer together as to what was best to be done in the circumstances in which they now found themselves placed. They spent the day in fasting and prayer, and parted "with a full conviction," as Whitefield says, "that God was about to do great things among them."

The campaign that was about to commence still wanted, however, its battle-field. This arena was furnished by open-air preaching, and to Whitefield belongs the honour of having been the first to occupy it. Though thousands flocked to the churches to hear him, he had to undergo the same treatment as his friends: in three days, five pulpits were closed against him. In the face of this increasing opposition, this brave young man of five-and-twenty did not hesitate long: he resolved to preach in the open air. Opportunity was soon offered for carrying his design into effect. At a little distance from Bristol there is a place called Kingswood, inhabited by a colliery population. These poor people were scarcely civilized: they had neither churches nor ministers, and none cared for the interests of their souls. During a visit that Whitefield paid to his native city of Bristol, he learned that many people had said of him, "If he will convert heathens, why does he not go to the colliers of Kingswood?" Finding his hands tied at Bristol, as elsewhere, by the ill-will of the clergy, he

decided to do so. One evening, the report of his arrival spread through Kingswood, and he found waiting for him a congregation of about two hundred colliers, to whom he preached the Gospel from the brow of a hill. This was Saturday, the 17th of February, 1739, a memorable date in the history of the English Revival, seeing that on that day the ground was chosen on which were to be gained many glorious victories. Encouraged by the success of this first attempt, Whitefield continued his open-air preaching at Kingswood. On his second visit he had two thousand hearers, on his third from four to five thousand, and the numbers speedily mounted to ten, fifteen, and twenty thousand. Nothing was more affecting than the sight of these immense crowds listening spell-bound to the great preacher; and frequently the silent tears, overflowing the eyes of the colliers, and leaving the traces of their passage upon their dusky cheeks, were in proof that his word had found an echo in their hearts. Numerous conversions rewarded the labours of the young missionary.

Shortly after, Whitefield preached at Bristol itself in a public garden, and complete success attended this experiment. But he was anxious to visit other parts of England, before returning to America, where urgent duties were awaiting him. Unwilling to leave his new converts without a pastor, he wrote to his friend Wesley, and begged him to come to Bristol in order to carry on the work. After some hesitation, the latter complied with his request, and left London. Arrived at Bristol, he debated with himself whether he ought to follow the example of his friend, and preach in the open-air too. "I could scarce reconcile myself at first," he says, "to this strange way of preaching in the fields, having been all my life (till very lately) so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order, that I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin, if it had not been done in a church."

He did not hesitate long : the voice of his calling was stronger than that of his prejudices, and on the second of April he preached to three thousand persons in a ground adjoining Bristol. From this moment the Revival of the eighteenth century entered upon its proper course, in which it was to be blessed with glorious success. In exchanging the regular pulpit for the public places, Christian preaching threw off what was artificial and affected, and Wesley began to speak to the people in the language of the people. Called now to carry on the work which his friend Whitefield had commenced at Bristol, he devoted himself to it with great ardour : he also knew how to consolidate it by uniting the few already awakened in the bonds of an extremely simple organization. He formed them into little societies after the model of those of London. These were the first which he actually founded himself ; and they may be considered as the first class-meetings, although they did not yet bear that name. Wesley speaks of them in his journal, April the 4th, 1739, in the following terms : " In the evening three women agreed to meet together weekly, with the same intention as those at London, viz., ' to confess their faults one to another, and pray one for another, that they may be healed.' At eight, four young men agreed to meet in pursuance of the same design. How dare any man deny this to be (as to the substance of it) a means of grace ordained by God ? Unless he will affirm (with Luther in the fury of his solifidianism) that St. James's Epistle is an epistle of straw." These small societies began almost immediately to increase in numbers, so much so that Wesley found himself obliged to build a place of worship for their accommodation. On the 12th of May, 1739, " with the voice of praise and thanksgiving," he solemnly laid the foundation of the humble structure—the first Methodist chapel ever built. His friends at Bristol brought him some small subscriptions, and he valiantly assumed the



responsibility of the undertaking. "Money, it is true," says he, "I had not, nor any human prospect or probability of procuring it: but I knew 'the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof;' and in His name set out, nothing doubting."

Wesley was actively employed also among the colliers of Kingswood. Before leaving, Whitefield had laid the corner-stone of a school which was about to be established among them. Wesley superintended the erection of it, and on its completion engaged a master and mistress. This was an excellent basis for the work of evangelization, which latter itself continued to prosper. The people joyfully received the glad tidings of the Gospel to which they had hitherto been strangers; and Kingswood soon became a changed place. It was no longer as formerly a haunt of debauchery and drunkenness; fighting and quarrelling gave place to harmony and peace; sacred hymns succeeded to lewd songs, and prayer to blasphemy.

As a result of the preaching of Whitefield and Wesley, new wants were created among these converted colliers. Desirous of partaking of the Lord's Supper, they repaired to the Bristol churches in such numbers that the regular ministers, unaccustomed to such manifestations of devotional feeling, and alarmed at the additional labour they occasioned, repelled them from the table under the pretext that they did not belong to their parish. Thus abandoned by their regular pastors, the colliers clung more closely than ever to the zealous missionaries who had awakened them from spiritual slumber. Wesley extended his pastoral labours to the towns and villages in the neighbourhood of Bristol, and already preached three times a day, at places very remote from each other. The new facilities afforded him by open-air preaching rendered it no longer necessary for him to confine himself to the narrow limits of a parish, or to the still narrower limits of the good-will of those

ministers who might grant him the use of their pulpits. From that time forward his preaching produced astonishing effects. Immense crowds assembled in the public places where he preached : neither rain nor storm could disperse them, and in general they gave him their patient and serious attention. This friendly feeling continued throughout the period of his first mission to Bristol, which extended over several months : more than once the people testified their sympathy by defending him against those who would have interrupted his preaching. On one occasion two men disturbed the congregation by singing a song ; Wesley gave out a hymn, which was sung with so much spirit by the whole assembly as to drown the voices of the malcontents. At Bath, a certain personage, well known for his irregular life and love of good cheer, undertook to encounter him. "There was great expectation at Bath," says Wesley, "of what a noted man was to do to me there ; and I was much entreated not to preach, because no one knew what might happen. By this report I also gained a much larger audience, among whom were many of the rich and great. I told them plainly, the Scripture had concluded them all under sin,—high and low, rich and poor, one with another. Many of them seemed to be a little surprised, and were sinking apace into seriousness, when their champion appeared, and coming close to me, asked by what authority I did these things. I replied, 'By the authority of Jesus Christ, conveyed to me by the (now) Archbishop of Canterbury, when he laid hands upon me, and said, Take thou authority to preach the Gospel.' He said, 'This is contrary to Act of Parliament : this is a conventicle.' I answered, 'Sir, the conventicles mentioned in that Act (as the preamble shows) are seditious meetings ; but this is not such ; here is no shadow of sedition ; therefore it is not contrary to that Act.' He replied, 'I say it is : and, beside, your preaching frightens people out of their wits.' 'Sir,

did you ever hear me preach ?' 'No.' 'How then can you judge of what you never heard ?' 'Sir, by common report !' 'Common report is not enough. Give me leave, Sir, to ask, Is not your name Nash ?' 'My name is Nash.' 'Sir, I dare not judge of you by common report : I think it not enough to judge by.' Here he paused awhile, and, having recovered himself, said, 'I desire to know what this people comes here for : ' on which one replied, 'Sir, leave him to me : let an old woman answer him. You, Mr. Nash, take care of your body ; we take care of our souls, and for the food of our souls we come here.' He replied not a word, but walked away."

Wesley aimed at something higher than evoking a fit of enthusiasm, which might soon prove evanescent. From the very commencement of this mission, he had witnessed numerous conversions. What appears the most striking in the records of these conversions, which abound in the pages of his journals, is, that they were usually instantaneous: they were like thunder-claps, and one can scarcely help being reminded by them of some analogous facts of Apostolic times. These inward experiences were sometimes accompanied by extreme physical prostration and a kind of convulsion of the whole nature. Men in perfect health, led by curiosity to the services, were convinced of sin under the word, and fell to the ground in a deadly swoon, or lay groaning in anguish. They remained in this state for hours, sometimes for days ; and then in a moment their distress gave place to a profound tranquillity.

Even in London, shortly after his return from Germany, Wesley saw similar effects produced by his preaching. One day while he was speaking at one of his meetings, a lady uttered a cry of distress. On his inquiring the cause, she told him that for three years she had been followed by a sense of her sins : that her husband, not understanding her grief, had consulted a clergyman, and after that a

doctor, neither of whom had understood her case, but that the preaching she had now heard had shown her the way of salvation. Wesley prayed with her, and she soon found peace. At another time he met with one of those persons, so numerous in those days, who stigmatised his work as a dangerous novelty, and seemed greatly exasperated against him. Finding argument to be of none other effect than to inflame her more and more, and suspecting that this opposition sprung from an attempt to stifle an already awakened conscience, he proposed prayer. "In a few minutes she fell into an extreme agony, both of body and soul ; and soon after cried out with the utmost earnestness, 'Now I know I am forgiven for Christ's sake.' And from that hour God set her face as a flint to declare the faith which before she persecuted."

At Bristol, the results of his first preaching were the same, and conversions were attended by still more remarkable signs. The services were continually interrupted by the cries and sobs of the hearers, seeking mercy. Conversions took place, accompanied by the most diversified and extraordinary incidents. At one time it is a mother, displeased at her daughter's sudden seizure, who is seized herself in the same manner, but revives under Wesley's prayers, and returns home with her daughter, full of joy. At another time a member of the Society of Friends was offended at the external manifestations, calling them mere mockery, and telling everybody that all who believe in them are hypocrites: one day while talking after this fashion at one of the meetings, he fell prostrate as if struck by a thunderbolt, and writhed in agony. Wesley pleaded on his behalf, and when the man came to himself, he exclaimed, "Now I know thou art a prophet of the Lord." At the same meeting there was present a weaver, a strong Churchman, who had come to examine into these things for himself. He carried away with him a very unfavourable

opinion, and everywhere spread it abroad that it was all a diabolical delusion. But Wesley's preaching had made a deeper impression than he was willing to confess even to himself. The next day, finding himself very uneasy in mind, he opened one of Wesley's tracts on salvation by faith : while he was reading it, he changed colour and fell to the ground, burdened with inexpressible anguish. The neighbours were alarmed and flocked to the house. They found him rolling on the ground, and screaming in an agony of despair. Two or three men tried to quiet him, but in vain. They ran to fetch Wesley : as soon as the poor man saw him, he cried out, "Ay, this is he who I said was a deceiver of the people. But God has overtaken me. I said, it was all a delusion ; but this is no delusion." He then roared out, "O thou devil ! thou cursed devil ! yea thou legion of devils ! thou canst not stay. Christ will cast thee out. I know His work is begun. Tear me to pieces, if thou wilt ; but thou canst not hurt me." Wesley prayed : his pangs ceased, and both his body and soul were set at liberty.

It should be said, however, that cases so extraordinary as this last were extremely rare, even at the beginning of Wesley's ministry. What was not rare, at this period, was for his preaching to be interrupted by the deep emotions of the multitude, and his voice drowned amid the groans of the penitents. After a time, these scenes became less common, and the Spirit of God wrought in a more gentle and uniform manner. Wesley carefully records facts like those we have just described, but scrupulously abstains from offering an explanation of them. So far from regarding physical prostrations as essential elements of conversion, as it has been affirmed without proof, he believed them to be either a device of the evil spirit, or else the natural consequence of deep inward anguish of soul. He, therefore, took care not to encourage, much less to excite, these

manifestations. His preaching had nothing in it to inflame the imagination : always calm and sober, it expended its force, not in exaggerating, but in demonstrating the truth.

To those who were scandalized by these scenes, (and many were so,) he said, "Come and see." A doctor at Bristol, full of prejudices against this work, wished to ascertain the truth for himself, and came to one of Wesley's meetings. A lady of his acquaintance, who was in perfect health, and of whose integrity he had no doubt, was that very day struck down by the Word, and, while he was present, fell into a state of great physical and mental anguish. The doctor watched the various symptoms with great attention, and when, after the lapse of some minutes, she was filled with peace and joy, he rose up and went away, declaring that the matter baffled all his science, and that he recognized in it the finger of God.

To his eldest brother, Samuel, who was greatly scandalized by these instantaneous conversions, and who severely criticised the entire movement, Wesley wrote, "The whole question turns chiefly, if not wholly, on matter of fact. You deny that God does now work these effects : at least that He works them in such a manner. I affirm both, because I have heard those facts with my ears, and seen them with my eyes. I have seen, as far as it can be seen, very many persons changed in a moment from the spirit of horror, fear, and despair, to the spirit of hope, joy, peace ; and from sinful desires, till then reigning over them, to a pure desire of doing the will of God. . . . Saw you him that was a lion till then, and is now a lamb ; he that was a drunkard, but now exemplarily sober ; the whoremonger that was, who now abhors the very lusts of the flesh ? These are my living arguments for what I assert."

These are, undoubtedly, the best arguments. Let it not be forgotten, however, that physical manifestations have

almost always accompanied the preaching of the Gospel during revivals that have followed long periods of spiritual torpor. In the eighteenth century, the preaching of salvation by faith was a novelty in England. Hence the amazement and agitation it produced in the minds of those who received the doctrine. Wesley, according to the apostolic method, preached the law as well as the Gospel. He placed in a strong light the heinousness of sin, and the deplorable consequences to which it led in this world and in the next. Such preaching was not addressed to the imagination or the sensibilities : it was one continuous appeal to the conscience. Who does not know that physical derangement is an ordinary effect of strong moral emotions ? This is especially true of the masses, who have not acquired the art of disguising their feelings.

While Wesley made Bristol the centre from whence he extended his labours through all the surrounding districts, his brother Charles was accomplishing a similar work in London in concert with Whitefield, who delayed his return to America on account of the crowds that flocked to his preaching and refused to let him go. In the metropolis as at Bristol, he was the first to preach in the open air, having chosen for his field of operations the large plain of Moorfields, the ordinary resort of mountebanks and players, and where he sometimes preached to an audience of twenty or thirty thousand. Wesley, having visited London in the course of the month of June, preached there also, to the great joy of his friend, who wrote in his journal the same evening, "I went to bed rejoicing that another fresh inroad was made into Satan's territories, by Mr. Wesley following me in field-preaching in London, as well as in Bristol."

This new work excited strong opposition on the part of the clergy. Many exceedingly bitter pamphlets had already been published against the Methodists, as they were now commonly called. The regular clergy, whose quiet had

been molested by the activity of the new missionaries, thundered against them from their pulpits, declaring that they preached faith without works, and thus sapped the foundations of all morality. The bishops also were alarmed at their progress. They beheld with amazement a movement, which at first appeared the dream of a few young enthusiasts, in the course of a single year taking such rapid strides, and threatening to embrace the whole country. Charles Wesley was cited to appear before the Archbishop of Canterbury to give an account of his "irregular conduct." The prelate reprimanded him smartly, and gave him to understand that unless he and his brother renounced their new mode of action, they would expose themselves to the penalties of the ecclesiastical canons, and even to excommunication itself. For a moment, these threats intimidated Charles Wesley. Happily, the ardent Whitefield was at hand, and by his advice Charles went to Moorfields on the following Sunday, and, for the first time, preached under the open canopy of heaven to ten thousand people. That was the best reply which he could make to the prelate's menaces. By this courageous conduct, he cut off all possible retreat, and boldly proclaimed that he regarded the voice of conscience more than that of an archbishop.

The ecclesiastical authorities at Bristol were no better disposed, and John Wesley was, in his turn, summoned to appear before the Bishop of that diocese. After a theological discussion on salvation by faith, in which the advantage certainly did not lie with the prelate, the latter attacked Wesley and his friends with much bitterness, accusing them of pretending to receive extraordinary revelations and gifts of the Holy Ghost: then he inveighed strongly against his erratic courses, and said loftily, "Sir, you have no business here. You are not commissioned to preach in this diocese. Therefore, I advise you to go hence." Wesley



replied firmly, "My Lord, my business on earth is, to do what good I can. Wherever, therefore, I think I can do most good, there must I stay, so long as I think so. At present, I think I can do most good here ; therefore, here I stay. As to my preaching here, a dispensation of the Gospel is committed to me ; and woe is me if I preach not the Gospel, wherever I am in the habitable world. Your Lordship knows, being ordained a priest, by the commission I then received, I am a priest of the Church universal ; and being ordained as Fellow of a College, I was not limited to any particular cure, but have an indeterminate commission to preach the Word of God in any part of the Church of England. I do not therefore conceive that, in preaching here by this commission, I break any human law. When I am convinced I do, then it will be time to ask, Shall I obey God or man ?"

A minister of the universal Church Wesley most truly was, and less disposed than ever to confine his labours within the limits of a parish. From Bristol, which continued for the present to be his head-quarters, he extended his operations not only over the whole immediate neighbourhood, but through Wales, and Devonshire, to London and Oxford, thus anticipating that peaceful invasion of the whole country, of which he was to be the leader in subsequent years : everywhere he saw multitudes flocking around him, and could consistently affirm that many souls were ripe for the Gospel. Thus was founded the plan of itinerant preaching, which enabled him by the aid of a few labourers to extend his operations far and wide, and which was to become one of the constituent elements of his ecclesiastical organization. It was with this department of the work as with the rest : it sprang from the exigencies of his position.

This memorable year, 1739, spent by Wesley in self-consuming toil, saw the foundations of Methodism laid at many

points simultaneously. London, Bristol, Kingswood, Wales, had heard the word from these ardent missionaries, and the revival had begun to assume a form of solid stability. If Wesley at this time had attained a clearer conception of the grandeur of the work set before him, he had already also good reason to calculate on its success.

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## CHAPTER II.

### *INTERNAL DIVISIONS: EXTERNAL PROGRESS.*

1740, 1741.

FROM the moment of its birth, the Revival of the eighteenth century was agitated by internal conflicts, which threatened to paralyze its activity and neutralize its success. Under an apparent unity there lay concealed, in fact, the most opposite tendencies, which could not but sooner or later display themselves openly. Although agreed on the grand doctrine of salvation by faith, the leaders of the movement entertained different views on some secondary doctrinal points; and these divergences of opinion now began to appear.

For nearly two years, the Wesleys had been labouring in conjunction with the Moravians. In the capital particularly, those persons who had been awakened by their means, were for the most part united to the Moravian societies; and the brothers themselves attended them when they were in London. But, at the close of the year 1739, Wesley's attention was called to the teachings of certain doctors recently arrived from Germany, who began to disseminate Antinomian and Quietist errors among the Societies. "They affirmed," says Wesley, "that we were all in a wrong way

still; that we had no faith at all; that faith admits of no degrees, and consequently weak faith is no faith; that none is justified till he has a clean heart, and is incapable of any doubt or fear. They affirmed also, that there is no commandment in the New Testament, but 'to believe;' that no other duty lies upon us; and that when a man does believe, he is not bound or obliged to do anything which is commanded there: in particular, that he is not subject to ordinances, that is (as they explained it) is not bound or obliged to pray, to communicate, to read or hear the Scriptures; but may or may not use any of these things (being in no bondage) according as he finds his heart free to it. They further affirmed that a believer cannot use any of these as a means of grace; that indeed there is no such thing as any means of grace, this expression having no foundation in Scripture; and that an unbeliever, or one who has not a clean heart, ought not to use them at all; ought not to pray, or search the Scriptures, or communicate, but to 'be still,' that is, leave off these 'works of the law;' and then he will surely receive faith, which, till he is 'still,' he cannot have."

These grave errors, which entirely emasculated the doctrine of salvation by faith, first gained a footing at Herrnhuth, and now threatened to obtain currency in England through the zeal of Molther and some other preachers. Their influence was still more strengthened by the French Quietism, which was being propagated by means of a translation of the works of Madame Guyon. The zeal and devotedness of Wesley had now acquired too much solidity to be moulded after the pattern of his ancient friends the mystics: hence, after vainly endeavouring to convince the Moravians of their errors, he decided to withdraw from them. On Sunday, the 20th of July, 1740, he read to the Society at Fetter Lane, a statement of his objections and grievances, and took final leave of it.

During the preceding year, Wesley had purchased an old building in London, which had long been used as a cannon foundry ; and had adapted it to the purposes of public worship. Here he took refuge with the five-and-twenty men and forty women who adhered to him after his separation from the Moravians. "We gathered up our wreck," says Charles Wesley, "*rari nantes in gurgite vasto*, floating here and there on the vast abyss, for nine out of ten were swallowed up in the dead sea of stillness."

The excellent Böhler, then absent from England, returned as speedily as possible, and endeavoured to restore union : but his efforts were unsuccessful, as were those of Spangenberg and Zinzendorf himself, who came over from Germany in order, if possible, to allay these sad dissensions. It is not our place to give an account of the discussions that followed. It was no time for compromise, and all attempts at re-union failed. The divisions of Christians are undoubtedly an evil in themselves ; but may we not believe that in this instance as in many others, God brought good out of evil for the greater advantage of the Church ? Would Methodism have accomplished so great a work in the world if it had been from the first merged in the Moravian body ? For our part, we regard it as a settled question, and are persuaded that each of these sections of the Church has had its special purpose, and has been called into existence to supply special necessities.

The deep anxiety occasioned by the strife with the Moravians, did not in any degree diminish Wesley's missionary activity. Not being able himself to meet the increasing demands of the work, he soon bethought himself of engaging as assistants the most pious and able members of his Societies. He requested John Cennick to watch over the Kingswood Society during his absence, and Thomas Maxfield to perform the same part toward the London Society. About the same period, John Nelson, a

stone-mason, converted in London under Wesley's instrumentality, began to preach in public. Wesley, still influenced by his ecclesiastical prejudices, did not as yet encourage lay-preaching, and we shall see that it was only by the force of circumstances that he was compelled at a later period to entertain the question.

The labourers were scattered over a wide field. Whitefield was carrying on a successful campaign in America; Charles Wesley was powerfully supporting his brother; Ingham was labouring in Yorkshire, Howell Harris in Wales, John Bennet in Derbyshire, David Taylor in Leicestershire. All these, differing in their education and opinions, were engaged in the same work, obeying, not a human prescription, but a Divine call.

Wesley also devoted the years 1740 and 1741 to the fruitful labours of an extensive itinerancy. His journals show him to have made London and Bristol his two centres, from whence he radiated to Bath, Windsor, Southampton, Leicester, Nottingham, and Wales. The success which had already attended his labours encouraged him to continue his open-air services, which by their very novelty excited curiosity and awakened interest. As soon as he approached any town, the mechanics deserted their workshops and the colliers their pits, and crowded to hear him. He did not at all times, indeed, meet with so cordial a welcome: it often happened that he was received the first time with open arms, but the second time with showers of stones. He knew enough, however, of the people he wished to benefit, not to be surprised at these sudden revolutions of feeling: he knew full well that, after being their favourite and their hero, nothing was more natural than that he should become their *bête noire*.

We must mark how Wesley could face a raging and furious mob, if we would form any idea of the intrepidity of his spirit and the power of his word. We shall presently

see what violent attacks he had to withstand a little later. But from the first, he was accustomed to encounter strong opposition, while engaged in his public ministrations. At Bristol, for instance, in the early part of the year 1740, many attempts were made by the rabble to break up the meetings. One evening, "not only the court and the alleys, but all the street, upwards and downwards, was filled with people, shouting, cursing, and swearing; and ready to swallow the ground with fierceness and rage. The mayor sent order that they should disperse. But they set him at nought. The chief constable came next in person, who was, till then, sufficiently prejudiced against us. But they insulted him also in so gross a manner as, I believe, fully opened his eyes. At length, the mayor sent several of his officers, who took the ringleaders into custody, and did not go till all the rest were dispersed." This firmness on the part of the authorities for a long time prevented such outbreaks.

The London populace were less easy to master, their habits of insubordination rendering them truly formidable. Wesley, however, almost always succeeded in frustrating their evil designs by dint of presence of mind. One day, he found the door of his chapel beset by a clamorous mob. So far from being disconcerted, he made no attempt to force a passage, but, thanking God for such an opportunity, at once began to preach to the multitude "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." By degrees the clamour subsided, and when he took leave of his hearers, they dismissed him "with many blessings."

Two days after this, a furious multitude took possession of the chapel, drowning the voice of the preacher with their cries, and openly insulting him. But he, always calm, let the storm expend its strength, and thus gained the ascendancy: the scene presently changed, tears flowed, and the lions became lambs.

In reference to this scene, Wesley wrote in his journal, "I wonder the devil has not wisdom enough to discern that he is destroying his own kingdom. I believe he has never yet, any one time, caused this open opposition to the truth of God, without losing one, or more, of his servants, who were found of God while they sought Him not." Shortly after, he writes, "When I came home, I found an innumerable mob round the door, who opened all their throats the moment they saw me. I desired my friends to go into the house; and then, walking into the midst of the people, proclaimed 'the name of the Lord, gracious and merciful, and repenting Him of the evil.' They stood staring one at another. I told them, they could not flee from the face of this great God: and therefore besought them, that we might all join together in crying to Him for mercy. To this they readily agreed: I then commended them to His grace, and went undisturbed to the little company within."

Wesley's ministrations were not only thus disturbed by the mob, but frequently also by individuals, who loaded him with insults, or strove to embarrass him by captious questions. On one occasion at Bristol, a man cried out in the midst of the meeting, "Thou art a hypocrite, a devil, an enemy to the Church. This is false doctrine. It is not the doctrine of the Church. It is damnable doctrine. It is the doctrine of devils." Wesley continued his sermon, undisturbed by the outcries of this reviler, who proved to be a Romish priest in disguise. At Nottingham, while he was preaching in the market, a man came behind, and began to interrupt him, uttering contradictions and blasphemy. Wesley turned and looked at him, and he stepped behind a pillar and disappeared.

But he had more formidable adversaries than these: the clergy constantly treated him as a deserter and an apostate, and reproached him with compromising the dignity of his

order, and degrading the robe he wore. These things were no stumbling-blocks to him : unfortunately, the ill-will of the clergy was not limited to words, and they were now about to wage war with the apostles of the Revival.

Wesley was something more than an evangelist : he was a spiritual pastor besides. Notwithstanding his incessant journeyings, he found time to visit the newly-converted, that he might encourage them to maintain their steadfastness. The sick received assiduous attention, and a large number accepted joyfully his message of salvation. Nor did he forget the prisoners, the class upon whom he had bestowed his first labours in Oxford. He was at Bristol in January, 1740, just returned from a journey, and intending not to leave this important post for some time to come, when he received from a young man, who was lying in a London prison under sentence of death, a message to the following effect :—"I adjure you by the living God, that you come and see me before I go hence." This young man, who had received some good impressions under Wesley's preaching, and had been for some time in his service, having been led astray by bad examples, had committed a highway robbery. On receiving this message, Wesley could not hesitate : notwithstanding the three days' journey which lay between him and London, he immediately set out. He found the prisoner in an interesting state of mind : he confessed that, in the short time he had spent with him at Bristol, he had unworthily abused his confidence and misappropriated a large sum out of the moneys collected for Kingswood School. This fact, of which Wesley knew nothing hitherto, so far from lessening his interest in the culprit, only increased his desire for his salvation. His labours resulted in his conversion, and shortly after, the young man was reprieved, and ultimately his sentence was commuted into transportation for life.

In the Bristol prisons, which Wesley often visited, he



was favoured with like success. Among others, a poor soldier, who was about to be executed, was converted through his means. Other condemned felons desired his services, but a certain alderman of the name of Beecher opposed their request, and refused him admission into the prison. Wesley mentions this in his journal, and adds, "I cite Alderman Beecher to answer for these souls at the judgment seat of Christ."

At the same time that he was carrying on the work of the Gospel, the new-born Societies were being well organized and increasing in number, notwithstanding the divisions which we have mentioned and which we shall have to mention presently. "It was easy to observe here," says Wesley of his Bristol Societies in March, 1740, "in how different a manner God works now from what He did last spring. He then poured along like a rapid flood, overwhelming all before Him. Whereas now,

He deigns his influence to infuse,  
Secret, refreshing as the silent dews.

Convictions sink deeper and deeper. Love and joy are more calm, even, and steady. And God, in many, is laying the axe to the root of the tree, who can have no rest in their spirits till they are fully renewed in the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness."

In separating from the Moravians, Wesley was careful to retain whatever he found useful in their organization. Everything that appeared likely to minister to the spiritual edification and consolidation of his Societies he reproduced among them. The band-meetings and love-feasts were in great favour both at Bristol and London. Wesley maintained a vigorous discipline among the "United Societies," as he now called them, excluding those members whose conduct was not consistent, and endeavouring at the same time to preserve unity and peace. The Societies had

already multiplied in number. In the month of September, 1741, that is, a little more than a twelvemonth after the rupture with the Moravians, they contained about a thousand members in London alone. These were almost wholly gathered from the lower classes. Nevertheless, Wesley endeavoured to train them to make sacrifices for the sustentation of the work of God. The winter of 1740 being extraordinarily severe, he appealed to his Bristol friends on behalf of the poor who wanted bread, and with the money thus collected was enabled to feed a hundred and sometimes a hundred and fifty a day, of those who needed it most, while the frost lasted. In London, he instituted a kind of order of deacons, consisting of twelve persons whose business it was to afford relief to the most necessitous cases. Each of these persons had a certain district under his care, in which he visited the poor and relieved them or procured them employment, besides paying special attention to the sick. Once a week they were to meet in order to give an account of what they had done, and consult what to do for the future. The necessary means were furnished by each member of Society subscribing a penny a week, and contributing further any garments they might be able to spare. Besides the poor-fund, there were other claims upon the new Societies which demanded further sacrifices. They already possessed property in chapels and schools, the debts on which needed to be paid off as soon as possible. The schools required considerable assistance. And although Wesley's flock enjoyed the benefits of his ministry at no cost to themselves, it was necessary to prepare them for the time when they might be called upon to support their own preachers.

An administrator of the highest order, Wesley entered into all the details of the internal management of his Societies; and thus gradually and by the force of circumstances originated a network of institutions, stamped with

the individuality of his own energetic spirit. But alas ! at the very time that this organization was being thus peacefully established, a storm arose which threatened to destroy it, and with it the spiritual life of which it was the outward embodiment.

Wesley and Whitefield had been brought by the same instrumentality into the enjoyment of salvation, and had at first laboured together in perfect harmony. But in their opinions on doctrinal points a divergence soon made itself apparent, which widened until it terminated in division. This divergence of opinion had respect to the doctrine of predestination, which Whitefield accepted in the strict Calvinistic sense, together with its logical consequences, which seem to make God partial and unjust. The practical tendencies of this doctrine were so obvious to Wesley's logical mind, that he could not accept it ; besides which, it appeared to him to involve a flat contradiction to the positive declarations of Holy Writ.

For some time the two friends agreed for peace' sake to maintain strict silence on this disputed point. Unfortunately, their followers did not display the same moderation. As soon as Whitefield had left for America, some of his party kindled the flame of dissension among the people in London and Bristol. Wesley, who desired to allow complete liberty of opinion on this point to all the members of his Societies, but was unwilling that they should become a theatre of strife, endeavoured to restore peace, beseeching the dissentients to refrain from vain disputes. When, however, he saw that they persisted in troubling the Societies, and refused to waive questions of so divisive a nature, after taking counsel with the members as a body, he expelled the disputants.

Shortly after, in obedience to what he considered a divine impulse, he preached at Bristol his celebrated sermon on Free Grace, the most moving and eloquent of all that he delivered.

This protest against the doctrine of the decrees was immediately published and widely circulated : a copy of it was forwarded to Whitefield in America, that he might see how complete was the breach between himself and his friend. His intercourse with the New England ministers had confirmed him in his views, and several letters had passed between him and Wesley upon the subject. He immediately published a reply to Wesley's sermon. A private letter of his, written to Wesley while he was in America, fell into the hands of some unscrupulous persons, who printed it without the consent of either party. One Sunday morning, before service, many copies were distributed among the people at the door of the chapel. Wesley, himself, having procured a copy, explained the unfair manner in which the letter had been printed, and then added, "I will do just what I believe Mr. Whitefield would, were he here himself," and "tore it in pieces before them all." All present followed his example, and destroyed the copies they had received at the door.

Whitefield, at the pressing instance of his adherents, returned to England, arriving on the 11th of March, 1741. His first thought, on meeting with Charles Wesley, was to labour in conjunction with the brothers to repair the mischief wrought by bitter dissensions. But in a short time, yielding to the influences by which he was surrounded, he declared to his old friends that he and they preached two different Gospels, and therefore he not only would not give them the right hand of fellowship, but was resolved publicly to preach against them wheresoever he preached at all. Shortly after, he did in fact publicly denounce Wesley by name, and that not far from the Foundery where Wesley was preaching at the same time. Other circumstances happened, equally lamentable, which completed the breach. This passage in the history of the great evangelists has been very variously regarded. For ourselves, without denying

that this polemical strife was waged with some severity on both sides, yet, after impartial examination, we are convinced that, for moderation both in speech and action, the advantage lay on Wesley's side.

Disastrous as was this schism, God did not permit it to destroy the Revival. Methodism was divided into two branches; but this division was, on the whole, a source of strength rather than of weakness. A merely factitious unity would have probably entailed intestine strifes, without dignity and without issue; whereas in its two sections, differently organized indeed but ranged under the same banner, the little band advanced from victory to victory.

Wesley and Whitefield, moreover, soon became reconciled, and suffered the past to be buried in oblivion: they exchanged friendly greetings, and ultimately occupied each other's pulpits. Their friendship rested on too solid a foundation to be permanently broken by secondary disagreements, and their hearts were too Christian not to realize the perfect accord existing between them on the essential verities of religion.

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## CHAPTER III.

### *LAY PREACHING. THE NORTH.*

1742.

FOR above three years Wesley had now been engaged in the work of his mission, and glorious success had already attended his labours. But this very success at times occasioned deep solicitude. He often asked himself how two or three ministers could suffice for the demands of the revival of religion which was now breaking out all over England.

Field-preaching afforded marvellous facilities for the work of evangelization : Wesley's constant itinerancy, and that of his fellow-labourers enabled them to extend their sphere of action in every direction, while their mighty faith obtained magnificent results. Were these successes to terminate in miserable collapse, for want of the necessary attention ? It was needful to unite, organize, and watch over the souls that had been awakened under the preaching : their religious education had yet to be begun : who was to undertake these responsibilities ? Wesley hoped at first to find auxiliaries among the Anglican clergy, but in this he was disappointed : here and there some timid sympathy was manifested, but the mass of the clergy were decidedly hostile to the movement. They closed their pulpits against the innovators, and offered stout resistance to those who had the audacity to disturb their peace.

There was only one way of escape from this embarrassing situation. It was that of grafting on the almost withered stock of the official ministry a lay order, selected from among the new converts, and able to understand and minister to the wants of their brethren. The idea was so daring that at first it seemed impracticable. Notwithstanding, it was the only possible solution of this difficult question. Wesley was led to adopt it by degrees and against his will. Events, or rather Providence itself, which permits events to happen, overruled his choice.

We have seen how Wesley had entrusted the care of his Societies in London, Bristol, and Kingswood to intelligent laymen, whose business it was in his absence to instruct them by reading the Scriptures, and adding such reflections as might be useful to the hearers. He did not permit them to preach, as this would have been, according to the opinions he had held hitherto, an encroachment upon the rights of the clergy. The limits he assigned them were not so well defined, however, as to render the observance of them

easy or even at all times practicable. One of the assistants, Thomas Maxfield, was so carried out of himself by his devoted zeal, that he soon overpassed those limits, and preached in London at the Society meetings with very great success. As soon as Wesley heard of it, he hastened back from Bristol to put a stop to what he considered a grave disorder.

Happily, his mother was there, and once more her counsel was of the greatest value. She now resided at the Foundery ; the prejudices she had entertained at first against the work her sons were carrying on had vanished, and she watched their progress with unfaltering sympathy.

On his arrival, she perceived that his countenance expressed dissatisfaction and anxiety, and asked the cause. "Thomas Maxfield has turned preacher, I find," he said, with unusual abruptness. "John," she replied, "you know what my sentiments have been. You cannot suspect me of favouring readily anything of this kind. But take care what you do with respect to that young man ; for he is as surely called of God to preach as you are. Examine what have been the fruits of his preaching, and hear him also yourself." Wesley perceived the reasonableness of this advice, and when he had heard Maxfield preach, he replied, "It is the Lord : let Him do what seemeth Him good." He saw in this a Providential indication, before which all his objections fell to the ground. The lay ministry was now established, and the result proved that this institution met the exigencies of the time, and was not a mere expedient invented to prop a falling cause, such as would be more likely to hasten its downfall than to contribute to its strength. This new agency soon attained large proportions. The Societies were compelled to choose from among themselves men who could watch over their brethren, and extend the work of evangelization. These men, raised up in their midst and accepted by Wesley, were pious and simple-

hearted laymen, who, without renouncing their worldly avocations, devoted all their leisure to the preaching of the Gospel. At the close of this year, Wesley had twenty such labourers under his direction.

In other ways also the Societies rapidly developed, and gradually assumed that form of regular organization which ultimately constituted the Methodist Church. On the 25th of March, 1742, Wesley divided the London Society into small sections, which made the "cure of souls" an easier task : this was the first occasion on which the system of class-meetings was adopted, that most important feature of the Methodist organization. He writes in his journal as follows : "I appointed several earnest and sensible men to meet me, to whom I showed the great difficulty I had long found, of knowing the people who desired to be under my care. After much discourse, they all agreed there could be no better way to come to a sure, thorough knowledge of each person, than to divide them into classes, like those at Bristol, under the inspection of those in whom I could most confide. This was the origin of our classes at London, for which I can never sufficiently praise God ; the unspeakable usefulness of the institution having ever since been more and more manifest."

Among the first preachers that God raised up to assist Wesley was John Nelson, an honest Yorkshire mason, who, while labouring in his earthly calling in London, had been converted in a remarkable manner under Wesley's preaching. Returning to his native county, he was constrained to make known to his neighbours the great change that had been wrought in him, and began to preach the Gospel to them. His simple and warm-hearted preaching, and his exemplary piety, produced an immense effect in his native town, and he had the joy of bringing many souls to Jesus. He wrote to Wesley to ask his advice ; who replied that he would visit him shortly. Accordingly, he did so in May, 1742.



This was his first missionary journey into the northern counties : during the last four years he had confined his labours to the southern districts, which he had literally scoured. There were magnificent successes in store for him in the North. He set out from London on horseback, and six days later arrived at Birstal, the town in which John Nelson's doings had created so much commotion. On his way, he met with an adventure which is significant enough, as showing the character of the times. "I overtook," he says, "a serious man, with whom I immediately fell into conversation. He presently gave me to know what his opinions were : therefore I said nothing to contradict them. But that did not content him : he was quite uneasy to know, whether I held the doctrine of the decrees as he did ; but I told him over and over, 'We had better keep to practical things, lest we should be angry at one another.' And so we did for two miles, till he caught me unawares, and dragged me into the dispute before I knew where I was. He then grew warmer and warmer ; told me I was rotten at heart, and supposed I was one of John Wesley's followers. I told him, 'No, I am John Wesley himself,' Upon which,—

‘ Improvisum aspris veluti qui sentibus anguem  
Pressit,——’ \*

he would gladly have run away outright. But, being the better mounted of the two, I kept close to his side, and endeavoured to show him his heart, till we came into the street of Northampton."

At Birstal, where Wesley scarcely expected to find a single Christian, he was agreeably surprised to meet with a small Society and an excellent preacher. Whatever doubts he may have had on the subject of lay-preaching, they must have been completely dissipated by the sight of what

\* "As one that has unawares trodden upon a snake."

Nelson had accomplished. After having preached in the open air to a large gathering, and examined closely the state of the little Birstal Society, Wesley continued his journey toward the North, leaving to Nelson the direction of the work he had begun.

On the 28th of May, he arrived at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, a town of considerable size, and the centre of one of the richest coal districts in England. It was also a sink of corruption and misery. The same evening, Wesley walked through the town, and remarked that he had never in so short a space of time seen and heard "so much drunkenness, cursing, and swearing, even from the mouths of little children." "Surely," said he to himself, "this place is ripe for Him who 'came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.'" He sought in vain for any seriously-disposed person. But he was not the man to retreat, and determined to begin his work without delay.

The following (Sunday) morning, at seven o'clock, he says, "I walked down to Sandgate, the poorest and most contemptible part of the town ; and, standing at the end of the street with John Taylor, began to sing the hundredth Psalm. Three or four people came out to see what was the matter ; who soon increased to four or five hundred. I suppose there might be twelve or fifteen hundred before I had done preaching ; to whom I applied those solemn words, 'He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities ; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him ; and by His stripes we are healed.' Observing the people, when I had done, to stand gaping and staring upon me, with the most profound astonishment, I told them, 'If you desire to know who I am, my name is John Wesley. At five in the evening, with God's help, I design to preach here again.'" At the hour appointed, the whole of the labouring population assembled in a body to hear him. Never, even in Bristol or London, had Wesley

addressed such a multitude. Ranged on the side of a hill, it formed a vast pyramid, undulating like the waves of the ocean, yet calm and serious in its demeanour. The preacher stood at the summit, where he could be seen of all, though it was not possible for one half of them to hear his voice. He again proclaimed the infinite mercy of God, and his powerful word smote many a conscience. When he had finished, he could scarcely make his way to his lodgings for the press: he was beset on all sides, everyone being so anxious to see him and speak to him, that he was almost trodden under foot by the crowd. Returning to his inn, he found it surrounded by people who had come to beg him to spend a few more days with them; but his engagements were already fixed, and he could not comply with their request.

Soon after, Charles Wesley visited Newcastle, and continued the work so auspiciously commenced by his brother. John himself returned before the end of the year, and devoted six weeks to the work of evangelization in this and the neighbouring towns. Nowhere had he met with so cordial a reception: the eagerness with which the people listened to the preaching of the Gospel filled him with joy. What formed a subject of still greater joy, was the numerous and remarkable conversions that attended his labours: some of them were accompanied by physical manifestations similar to those he had witnessed in the southern counties. Generally, however, the work proceeded more quietly. "I never saw a work of God," says he, "in any other place, so evenly and gradually carried on. It continually rises, step by step. Not so much seems to be done at any one time, as hath frequently been at Bristol or London; but something at every time. It is the same with particular souls. I saw none in that triumph of faith, which has been so common in other places. But the believers go on calm and steady. Let God do as seemeth Him good."

Before leaving Newcastle, Wesley bought a piece of land and commenced the erection of a chapel, with an asylum for orphan children. He understood from the first the breadth and importance of the enterprise in which he was engaged. This undertaking also was a work of faith. "It being computed that such a house as was proposed could not be finished under seven hundred pounds, many were positive it would never be finished at all ; others, that I should not live to see it covered. I was of another mind ; nothing doubting but, as it was begun for God's sake, He would provide what was needful for the finishing it."

Returning from the north, he preached in the towns that lay on his route, and took this opportunity of visiting Epworth, his native place. Here, in his father's own parish, the pulpit was refused to him by his father's successor, who also proceeded to the length of preaching openly against him. At the close of the sermon, Wesley, who was not to be daunted by opposition, caused it to be announced that he would preach in the churchyard. He accordingly did so, taking his stand on his father's tombstone, and addressing from thence a large and sympathizing audience. Every day for a week he preached on the same spot, and produced a profound impression on the minds of the people. Many persons were awakened to a serious seeking of the blessings of salvation. Even infidels were moved by his powerful appeals. One man who passed for a brave fellow, and who boasted that for thirty years he had never entered a church, came out of curiosity to hear him. Seeing him stand, motionless as a statue and evidently absorbed in thought, Wesley went up to him and asked him abruptly, "Sir, are you a sinner?" He replied with a deep and broken voice, "Sinner enough," and continued staring upwards till his wife and a servant or two, who were all in tears, put him into his chaise and carried him home. Ten years later,

Wesley saw him again, and learned from his own lips, that from that time forward he had become a changed man, and that he was now rejoicing in God, without either doubt or fear, waiting for the welcome hour when he should depart and be with Christ.

During his stay at Epworth, Wesley waited upon a Justice of the peace, an excellent man in all respects, to whom the populace had brought "a whole waggon load of these new heretics," in order that he might deal with them according to their deserts. The magistrate with the utmost gravity asked what had been their crime. At this there was a deep silence, for this was a point their conductors had forgot. At length, one said, "Why they pretend to be better than other people ; and besides, they pray from morning to night." "But," asked the magistrate, "have they done nothing besides?" "Yes, Sir," said an old man, "an't please your worship, they have *convarted* my wife. Till she went among them, she had such a tongue ! And now she is as quiet as a lamb." "Carry them back, carry them back," replied the Justice, "and let them convert all the scolds in the town."

This curious anecdote shows that, at Epworth as at Birstal, there were Methodists before Wesley came : his labours encouraged them and added to their number, and on his departure he left an organized and self-sustaining Society.

Wesley had scarcely returned from this journey when he was called to the death-bed of his mother. He found her on the borders of eternity. "Her look was calm and serene, and her eyes fixed upward," while those around her "commended her soul to God." Before she died, she said to them, "Children, as soon as I am released, sing a psalm of praise to God." They fulfilled her request, and a song of praise, interrupted by the sobs of the mourners, was heard in the chamber from which the spirit of Susanna Wesley

had just escaped to the skies. So serene a death, crowning a life so useful, taught Wesley lessons as valuable as any he had ever received from his mother.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### *CONFLICTS AND PERSECUTIONS.*

1743, 1744.

WESLEY'S missionary journeys continued without intermission in 1743, but from this date they extended over a wider area. Special attention was due to the northern counties, where his first labours promised such results. So numerous and rapid were these journeys that it would be impossible for us to describe them minutely and in succession. Wesley was the itinerant preacher, *par excellence*. He rarely stayed more than a few days, often not more than a few hours, in one place : he was incessantly traversing the country, insensible alike to fatigue and to the inclemency of the weather, absorbed by the single idea of saving souls, and for that purpose buying up every moment.

Early in the year 1743 he was at Epworth again, where the clergyman, who owed his all to Wesley's father, behaved in a manner utterly unworthy of him, and repelled him from the Lord's table in the very church where he had so frequently himself ministered. In February, he paid his third visit to Newcastle, where the temporal and spiritual destitution he beheld excited his deepest sympathy. "I found," says he, "we were got into the very Kingswood of the north. Twenty or thirty wild children ran round us, as soon as we came, staring as in amaze. They could not properly be said to be either clothed or naked. One of the

largest (a girl about fifteen) had a piece of a ragged, dirty blanket, some way hung about her, and a kind of cap on her head, of the same cloth and colour. My heart was exceedingly enlarged towards them ; and they looked as if they would have swallowed me up."

From personal observation and scrutiny, it was manifest to Wesley that the work at Newcastle was in full prosperity. Conversions were multiplied, and the little Society waxed stronger and stronger. He paid special attention to the physical phenomena which had accompanied the preaching. They had occurred here in greater frequency than elsewhere, and he made a serious inquiry into the subject. It was ascertained that all those who had experienced these strange seizures, had previously enjoyed excellent health, that the symptoms came upon them in a moment without any previous notice, that they assumed the form of a complete physical and mental prostration, accompanied by violent pain. This pain was variously described by the persons whom Wesley questioned. Some said that they felt just as if a sword was running through them : others, that they thought a great weight lay upon them, as if it would squeeze them into the earth : others, again, that they were quite choked, so that they could not breathe. In every case, deep spiritual distress had accompanied the physical symptoms, which ceased as soon as their souls were set at liberty. It was while visiting the surrounding localities that Wesley saw the necessity of regulating his itinerancy according to a definite plan, and of concentrating his efforts instead of spreading them over too wide a surface. This determination of his gave rise to the formation of Circuits. The idea was simple, but it has since borne fruit abundantly. It was that of gathering round one central station a certain number of outposts, and placing them under the care of one or more preachers, who were constantly engaged in making the round of the

Circuit thus formed. Newcastle became one of the most important centres of operation, owing to the numerous outlying places which Wesley had annexed to it.

One of the localities which he now visited for the first time was the village of Placey, ten miles north of Newcastle, where he met with another specimen of an almost savage, yet accessible population, whose sympathies he knew so well how to win. "It is inhabited," he says, "by colliers only, and such as had been always in the first rank for savage ignorance and wickedness of every kind. Their grand assembly used to be on the Lord's day; on which, men, women, and children met together, to dance, fight, curse and swear, and play at chuck, ball, span-farthing, or whatever came next to hand. I felt great compassion for these poor creatures, from the time I heard of them first; and the more, because all men seemed to despair of them. Between seven and eight (on Good Friday) I set out with John Heally, my guide. The north wind, being unusually high, drove the sleet in our face, which froze as it fell, and cased us over presently. When we came to Placey, we could very hardly stand. As soon as we were a little recovered, I went into the square, and declared Him who 'was wounded for our transgressions' and 'bruised for our iniquities.' The poor sinners were quickly gathered together, and gave earnest heed to the things which were spoken. And so they did in the afternoon again, in spite of the wind and snow, when I besought them to receive Him for their King; to 'repent, and believe the Gospel.'"

A few days after, Wesley preached there again, and some remarkable conversions took place. On his fourth visit to the North, in the July following, he organized a small Society, which gave him great satisfaction. And several years after he could say of them, "The Society of colliers here may be a pattern to all the Societies in England. No person ever misses his band or class: they have no jar of



any kind among them ; but with one heart and one mind 'provoke one another to love and to good works.' " Whenever he visited the North, he was happy to be among the "honest and simple-hearted colliers at Placey."

Returning from Newcastle, Wesley was joined at Birstal by his valiant friend Nelson, and with him paid his first visit to Leeds, a place which was to become a metropolis of Methodism in the north of England. Here he found a little Society already formed, probably through the instrumentality of Nelson.

It was not everywhere that Wesley and his fellow-labourers enjoyed such a reception as they had met with at Newcastle. In Leeds itself symptoms of disorder appeared, which required all his authority and presence of mind to keep in check. A drunken crowd having one day broken into the chapel and interrupted the preaching, he began to pray for them with that irresistible fervour which he always threw into that holy exercise. The mob, startled by so unexpected a movement on his part, were completely beaten, and quietly withdrew.

In London, the evil passions of the multitude were still more violently unloosed. One day, while Wesley was preaching in a public place called the Great Gardens, "many of the beasts of the people laboured much to disturb those who were of a better mind. They endeavoured to drive in a herd of cows among them ; but the brutes were wiser than their masters. They then threw whole showers of stones, one of which struck me just between the eyes ; but I felt no pain at all ; and, when I had wiped away the blood, went on testifying with a loud voice that God hath given to them that believe, 'not the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.' And by the spirit which now appeared through the whole congregation, I plainly saw what a blessing it is when it is given us, even in the lowest degree, to suffer for His name's sake."

In another part of the metropolis, at Chelsea, the people amused themselves by throwing wild-fire and other combustibles into the room where his Society was peacefully assembled. This appears to have been a favourite diversion at that time with the people of London and its vicinity. At Windsor, says Wesley, "I was soon informed, that a large number of the rabble had combined together ; and declared, again and again, there should be no preaching there that day. In order to make all sure, they had provided gunpowder enough, and other things, some days before. But Burnham fair coming between, they agreed to go thither first, and have a little diversion there. Accordingly they went, and bestowed a few of their crackers upon their brother-mob at Burnham. But these, not being Methodists, did not take it well, turned upon them, and gave them chase. They took shelter in an house. But that would not serve ; for those without soon forced a way in, and seized on as many as they could find, who, upon information made, were sent to gaol : the rest ran away ; so that when I came, none hindered or interrupted."

These disorders were not long permitted to remain unchecked in London and the neighbourhood. The authorities took active proceedings against the ringleaders, and the chief of the judges of Middlesex said to Mr. Wesley, " We have received orders to do you justice whenever you claim our protection." An opportunity soon presented itself. A multitude of the baser sort assailed one of the places of worship with showers of stones, some of which broke the roof, and, falling on the congregation, endangered their very lives. Wesley warned the mob that unless they left the place, he would bring some of them before the magistrates. Finding that his warning was unheeded, he had one of the ringleaders arrested and conducted under strong escort to a court of justice. This firmness was of great service, and an end was soon put to these disturbances,

so far as the capital was concerned. In the course of this last scene, a remarkable incident occurred. A man and his wife, who took the lead among the rioters, and seemed to be more enraged than any of them, as soon as they entered the chapel, turned pale and, smitten with sudden conviction, fell on their knees and cried to God for mercy.

These, however, were but slight skirmishes compared with the terrible attacks made on the Methodists during the year 1743, in some of the midland and southern counties, especially in Staffordshire and Cornwall. Charles Wesley was more roughly handled even than his brother. At Walsall, he was repeatedly assailed with stones and felled to the ground. At Sheffield, the populace, headed by a military officer, broke into one of his meetings: the preacher bravely kept his ground at the peril of his life, and received several wounds in the course of the affray. The officer, enraged at his firmness, drew his sword and pointed it at the preacher's breast, but did not succeed in frightening him. The Sheffield mob, excited by the declamations of an intolerant clergy, proceeded to the greatest excesses, and entirely demolished the chapel. In Cornwall, Charles Wesley met with no better reception. At Saint Ives, a furious multitude took possession of the chapel, broke the windows and destroyed the furniture. At Poole, the mob, headed by one of the churchwardens, chased the preacher and his friends from the parish.\*

Shortly after his brother's return, John Wesley visited Cornwall in company with Nelson, and spent two months in the county. He preached at several places which he had never before visited. During this period of indefatigable labour, he often suffered for lack of the common necessities of life. His bed was frequently the bare boards, and his only pillow an old great coat. One night he awoke

\* The parish registers preserve to this day a record of expenses at the village inn "for driving the Methodists."

his companion, and said, "Brother Nelson, let us be of good cheer ; I have one whole side yet ; for the skin is off but on one side." More than once, they had to endure the pangs of hunger in the midst of a people who were slow to comprehend the duty of hospitality. Wesley one day stopped his horse, and began to pick the blackberries that were growing in the hedge, saying, as he did so, "Brother Nelson, we ought to be thankful that there are plenty of blackberries ; for this is the best country I ever saw for getting a stomach, but the worst that ever I saw for getting food. Do the people think we can live by preaching ?" These trials were, however, not so formidable as those which his brother had recently met with in the county, nor as those which awaited himself in Staffordshire, whither he now went to follow up the work so nobly begun by Charles.

On a former occasion, Wesley had preached at Wednesbury without being molested : the colliers appeared to be favourably disposed, and a Society of some three or four hundred was gathered from among the converts. These successes, however, excited the wrath of the clergyman, who inveighed against the Methodists from the pulpit in violent language : the local authorities forgot their duty, and rather encouraged than restrained the evil passions of the mob, who soon began to indulge in unheard-of excesses. They assembled at the blowing of a horn, and besieging the dwelling-houses of the Methodists, pillaged them ; broke the doors and windows, the furniture and crockery, and laid violent hands on all that came within their reach. Persons were no more regarded than property : the women and children were seized and thrown into the gutter. The mob, which for many months was rampant in the town, drew up a form of recantation to be signed by all the Methodists : those who refused compliance were beaten and otherwise maltreated, to the endangering of their lives.

On hearing of the trials to which the brethren were thus exposed at Wednesbury, Wesley determined to repair thither immediately, in order to comfort and encourage them. It was a maxim with him always to face danger. The day after his arrival he preached at noon, in the middle of the town, and whether it was that his boldness intimidated the mob, or from some other motive, none interfered. But in the afternoon, while he was quietly writing in his room, he discovered from the noise that the mob had beset the house. He exhorted the people with whom he was lodging, to engage in prayer. For a moment it seemed as if the people were about to disperse ; but presently, being reinforced by new arrivals, they rallied again to the attack. "The cry of one and all was, 'Bring out the minister ; we will have the minister.' I desired one to take their captain by the hand, and bring him into the house. After a few sentences interchanged between us, the lion was become a lamb. I desired him to go and bring one or two more of the most angry of his companions. He brought in two, who were ready to swallow the ground with rage ; but in two minutes they were as calm as he. I then bade them make way, that I might go out among the people. As soon as I was in the midst of them, I called for a chair ; and standing up, asked, 'What do any of you want with me ?' Some said, 'We want you to go with us to the Justice.' I replied, 'That I will, with all my heart.' I then spoke a few words, which God applied ; so that they cried out with might and main, 'The gentleman is an honest gentleman, and we will spill our blood in his defence.'" Some were not so favourably disposed however, and Wesley went with two or three hundred of the mob, through torrents of rain, to the Justice, who lived about two miles from the town. This gentleman refused to intermeddle with the matter, on the plea that he was in bed.

In the meantime, the news had spread through Walsall

that Wesley had just been brought thither under good escort : immediately, all the worst spirits in the town (and they were many) gathered together and set out in search of him. "The Darlaston mob made what defence they could ; but they were weary, as well as outnumbered : so that in a short time, many being knocked down, the rest ran away, and left me in their hands. To attempt speaking was vain ; for the noise on every side was like the roaring of the sea. So they dragged me along till we came to the town ; where, seeing the door of a large house open, I attempted to go in ; but a man, catching me by the hair, pulled me back into the middle of the mob. They made no more stop till they had carried me through the main street, from one end of the town to the other. I continued speaking all the time to those within hearing, feeling no pain or weariness. At the west end of the town, seeing a door half open, I made toward it, and would have gone in ; but a gentleman in the shop would not suffer me, saying, they would pull the house down to the ground. However, I stood at the door, and asked, 'Are you willing to hear me speak ?' Many cried out, 'No, no ! Knock his brains out ; down with him ; kill him at once.' Others said, 'Nay, but we will hear him first.' I began asking, 'What evil have I done ? Which of you all have I wronged in word or deed ?' And continued speaking for above a quarter of an hour, till my voice suddenly failed : then the floods began to lift up their voice again ; many crying out, 'Bring him away ! bring him away !' In the meantime my strength and my voice returned, and I broke out aloud in prayer. And now the man who just before headed the mob, turned and said, 'Sir, I will spend my life for you : follow me, and not one soul here shall touch a hair of your head.' Two or three of his fellows confirmed his words and got close to me immediately . . . The people then, as if it had been by common consent, fell back to the right and left ; while

those three or four men took me between them and carried me through them all . . . till a little before ten, God brought me safe to Wednesbury ; having lost only one flap of my waistcoat, and a little skin from one of my hands. I never saw such a chain of providences before." The following are the chief of them. In descending a steep and slippery part of the road, many attempts were made to throw him down : had they been successful he would probably have been trodden to death. But he made no stumble at all, nor the least slip, till he was entirely out of their hands. A strong man aimed several blows with a bludgeon at the back of his head, but they were all turned aside, Wesley says he knew not how. He received a powerful blow on the chest, and another on the mouth, making the blood gush out ; but he felt no more pain, he affirms, from either than if they had touched him with a straw. And "from the beginning to the end, he found the same presence of mind, as if he had been sitting in his own study."

In appearance, Wesley had been conquered at Wednesbury and Walsall : in reality, he was the conqueror. And the proof of this is that his brother Charles, visiting the place a little later, found quite a change in the disposition of the people : many conversions took place, and among the number was that of the man that headed the mob, who was a notorious prize-fighter. Charles asked him what he thought of his brother. "Think of him ?" said he ; "that he is a man of God, and God was on his side when so many of us could not kill one man." A man of God, indeed, was John Wesley, daunted by no difficulty in the great work of saving men's souls.

Pursuing his journey northwards, Wesley arrived at Grimsby, where he preached in the open air, and on the following day sought a place in which to hold his meetings. The inhabitants, however, fearing the consequences, refused to lend their houses for such a purpose. At last, a

woman offered him the use of her house. She was an unfortunate, who had abandoned her husband, and been for some time leading a life of dissipation. Wesley calling to mind the example of his Master, and hoping to snatch this brand from the burning, accepted her invitation. He preached on the "woman that was a sinner," who washed the Lord's feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. The prodigal was "utterly broken in pieces," and afterwards came to his lodgings, crying out, "O Sir! what must I do to be saved?" Wesley replied, "Escape for your life. Return instantly to your husband." She answered that her husband was at Newcastle, a hundred miles off. The great missionary reflected a little, and then told her, "I am going for Newcastle in the morning: you may go with me. William Blow shall take you behind him." And so he did. A more touching scene than this is, perhaps, scarcely to be found in the whole course of Wesley's life,—the good shepherd bringing the lost sheep back to the fold. It shows that he did not consider his work complete when he had harangued the multitude: he was both preacher and pastor too.

The year 1744 brought Wesley and his fellow-labourers new trials, equally severe with those we have just described. Popular demonstrations were the order of the day. These were no longer confined to the destruction and pillage of property: the very persons of the Methodists were not safe. One preacher received serious bodily injuries, another was ducked in a river till he was nearly dead. These servants of God, in their encounters with the populace, counted themselves happy when they escaped with a whole skin, and had nothing more to complain of than that their garments were torn to tatters or covered with mud. At Darlaston, poor defenceless women were maltreated and subjected to the grossest indignities. Some of the towns of Staffordshire were for months at the mercy



of the mob. The Walsall mob assumed the form of a regular crusade against Methodism : a flag was made, which was frequently hoisted in the market-place, and borne before the multitude when they proceeded on their expeditions. The houses suspected of harbouring Methodists were devoted to destruction : the defenders of the Church appropriated what they pleased of the furniture, and broke the rest in pieces. From these storms of popular fury men and women fled, not knowing where to turn for shelter. Their constancy and faithfulness were beyond all praise. When overtures of peace were made to them on condition that they promised not to receive the preachers any more, they stoutly refused, saying, " We have already lost all our goods ; and nothing more can follow but the loss of our lives, which we will lose too, rather than wrong our consciences."

These persecuted ones had no protection. Public opinion was hostile to them, and misrepresented their conduct and motives. The " London Evening Post " published an article which began as follows :—" By a private letter from Staffordshire, we have advice of an insurrection of the people called Methodists." It was stated that, under pretence of having been insulted by the Church party, they had raised an insurrection, and, after committing several assaults, had burnt down the house of one of their opponents.

Thus calumniated before the public, the Methodists could obtain no redress from the civil or ecclesiastical authorities. At Dudley, on the instigation of the clergyman, the mob laid violent hands upon a preacher, and would have murdered him, but for an honest quaker, who lent him his broad-brimmed hat and plain coat, and so enabled him to effect his escape. At Walsall, the magistrates permitted a placard to remain on the walls, announcing the destruction of the Methodists on a certain day. At Wednesbury, one of those functionaries offered five pounds to have them

driven out of the town ; and another delivered up a member of Society to the mob, and, waving his hand over him, shouted "Huzza, boys! well done! stand up for the Church!"

While the magistrates were thus bravely defending the Church, its ministers were not behindhand. During his most successful tour through Cornwall in 1744, Wesley heard a sermon in which the Methodists were denounced as Papists, and as the partisans of the Pretender, Charles Stuart. In another place, the minister called the mob together at the sound of a drum, for the purpose of interrupting the Methodist services, and, after supplying his auxiliaries at a tavern with plentiful potations, himself led them on to the attack. The vicar of Birstal, whose quiet was disturbed by the activity of Nelson, joined with a publican belonging to the neighbourhood in denouncing the poor preacher to the military authorities, and succeeded in getting him impressed into the service under the Act for the prevention of vagrancy. Two other itinerants suffered in the same way, and one of them fell a victim to the treatment he received in the army.

To these persecutions were added all sorts of calumnies. Accusations of hypocrisy and imposture were of too common occurrence to ruffle Wesley's mind. Gibes and jeers were showered upon him, but he remained unmoved. All weapons were lawful in such a warfare as this. At Newcastle, he saw a placard on the walls announcing that a company of actors from Edinburgh would the same evening perform a piece entitled, "Trick upon trick ; or, Methodism displayed." Hatred and prejudice were so rife that the most absurd reports gained credence. Some said that Wesley had hanged himself; others that he had been prosecuted for unlawfully selling gin ; others declared that he usurped his own name, and that the real John Wesley had been dead for many years. A Quaker in one place, an

Anabaptist in another, it was still more generally suspected that he was a Jesuit of the worst kind, harbouring priests in his house, and labouring in an underhand way to destroy the Established Church. The popular mind, agitated by rumours connected with the invasion of the Pretender, did not fail to associate with these the name of Wesley. He was an agent of the Spanish government, sent to excite a feeling in favour of the fallen dynasty, and to organize a body of twenty thousand men in aid of the Spanish army whenever it should make a descent upon the coast. He had been seen with the Pretender in France, and, finally, had been arrested on a charge of high treason. These absurd reports obtained such currency, that the authorities themselves took the alarm : Wesley was ordered to appear before the Justices of Surrey, and required to take the oath of allegiance to the King, and to sign the declaration against Popery. Early in 1744, when the Government issued a proclamation requiring all Catholics to quit London, Wesley remained a week longer in the city, in order not to afford fresh grounds for scandal. His brother was also indicted before the magistrates in Yorkshire, on account of a suspicious expression he had made use of in one of his prayers. He had asked God to "call home his banished ones," and this was supposed to apply to the persecuted dynasty.

The opposition thus created by the enemies of the Revival, did not for a moment daunt the champions of this noble cause. It only served to show the urgent necessity that existed for their labours : it only encouraged them to devote themselves with greater ardour than ever to their work.

## CHAPTER V.

*THE FIRST CONFERENCE.*

1744.

WESLEY had been engaged for the last five years in laying the foundations of the Societies that were destined to bear his name, and during this first period of its history Methodism was, so to speak, personified in its Founder. Under his direction the work had wonderfully prospered, and the time seemed to have come when the responsibility should be shared by his fellow-labourers. Accordingly, early in 1744, he invited those clergymen of the Established Church who were associated with him in his work, together with the principal lay-preachers who served him "as sons in the Gospel," to meet him in London, in order to consider the best means of carrying on the work of God. The object of this first Conference is clearly indicated in the letter of invitation: it was not, designedly at least, to organize a Church, but simply to consult how best to prosecute the work of the Revival. Wesley was still in the habit of obeying the directions of Providence, as taught by time and experience.

This first Conference was composed of six clergymen and four lay-preachers, and met at the Foundery, in London, on the 25th of June, 1744. The night before, its members solemnly partook together of the Lord's Supper, and in the morning Charles Wesley preached to the assembled brethren. The little assembly was thus from the first pervaded by a spirit of deep seriousness, and was manifestly sensible of the magnitude of the responsibility attaching to its deliberations. One of its first resolutions was as follows:—  
 "It is desired that all things be considered as in the

immediate presence of God ; that we may meet with a single eye, and as little children who have everything to learn ; that every point may be examined from the foundation ; that every person may speak freely what is in his heart ; and that every question proposed may be fully debated, and ‘ bolted to the bran.’ ” The first preliminary question was then proposed, namely, “ How far does each of us agree to submit to the unanimous judgment of the rest ? ” It was answered, “ In speculative things, each can only submit so far as his judgment shall be convinced. In every practical point, so far as we can, without wounding our several consciences.” Never did any deliberative assembly draw up for its guidance regulations more prudent, and at the same time more in accordance with the spirit of Christianity.

The first great design of this meeting was then proposed under three heads, viz., “ 1. What to teach ; 2. How to teach ; 3. What to do : that is, how to regulate our doctrine, discipline, and practice.” Two whole days were devoted to the investigation of the vital doctrines which formed the basis of the Revival, and the substance of the teachings of its promoters. Wesley and his friends laid the greatest stress on these practical truths which are fundamental to the Christian life, such as repentance, faith, justification, sanctification, and the witness of the Spirit. Their business was not to draw up a creed or confession of faith, but clearly and strongly to reassert the great doctrines which the Church had allowed to drop into oblivion. Their work was that of witnesses rather than of theologians.

As to the best general method of preaching, the Conference recommended the preachers, “ 1. To invite. 2. To convince. 3. To offer Christ. Lastly, to build up ; and to do this, in some measure, in every sermon.”

Another subject, that inevitably claimed the serious consideration of the Conference, was the relation of the

Societies to the Established Church. Wesley clung to the belief that it was still possible to maintain a substantial unity, though the attitude of the clergy was beginning to awaken some fears on this point. By that very circumstance, however, the responsibilities of Methodism were increased and multiplied. And it was ready to accept them. On the question, "How far is it our duty to obey the Bishops?" the Conference gave its judgment as follows, "*In all things indifferent.*" And on this ground of obeying them, we should observe the canons, so far as we can *with a safe conscience.*" The spirit which dictated this resolution was both judicious and liberal, and it shows the marked advancement that had taken place in Wesley's ecclesiastical views.

The internal discipline of the Societies also received a due share of attention, as is shown by the following questions and answers. "Q. How are the people divided, who desire to be under your care? A. Into the United Societies, the Bands, the Select Societies, and the Penitents. Q. How do these differ from each other? A. The United Societies (which are the largest of all) consist of awakened persons: part of these, who are supposed to have remission of sins, are more closely united in the Bands. Those of the Bands who seem to walk in the light of God, compose the Select Societies: those of them who are for the present fallen from grace, meet apart as Penitents." Particular rules for each of these classes of members were adopted by the Conference. Among the rest are to be found the Rules of the Society which are still in force at the present day. The most remarkable point in connection with them is that they do not make any particular religious opinion the basis of union. There is only one condition previously required of those who desire admission into these Societies,—"*a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and be saved from their sins.*"

Experience soon showed the impracticableness of a four-

fold division of the Societies, according to the spiritual state of the several members. This arrangement soon, however, became modified, and the excellent idea that gave rise to it was carried out in a more simple form. This idea, which may be regarded as the fundamental principle of Methodism, and to which it owes its individuality, is that of associated spiritual life ; and it found its realization in the class-meeting. These little gatherings satisfied that instinctive desire for communion and mutual edification, which is one of the natural features of a living Church, and formed a practical embodiment of the idea of "churches within the Church," borrowed by the Moravians from Spener. A small number of persons seeking the salvation of their souls, were placed under the direction of an experienced Christian, and thus formed a kind of spiritual family, in which they communed together of their joys and sorrows, their prosperity or adversity ; in which the strong ministered to the necessity of the weak and learned to sustain them, and the weak were stimulated by the example of the strong and learned to surmount their weakness. In our opinion the class-meeting, more than any other human institution, has realized the great idea of the unity of the Church and of the communion of saints. And by making this the foundation of his system, Wesley secured the prosperity and permanence of his work : it was indeed a stroke of genius, or rather, it was one of those providential indications which he so well knew how to turn to account. It was the class-meeting alone that made it possible for Methodism to spread as it did throughout England with a rapidity that still excites the astonishment of the historian. It kindled everywhere new fires of religious life which could, if necessary, become self-feeding and maintain an independent existence, and thus formed an indispensable auxiliary to missionary operations. And it provided a religious training for thousands of new converts, whose

transition was immediate from a state of indifference and sometimes of brutishness, to the enjoyment of spiritual life.

We have already seen how lay-preaching became with Wesley a practical necessity. It was time to inquire into the lawfulness and utility of this novel institution. The Conference did not hesitate to declare its conviction that this new agency met the urgent needs of the times, and encouraged Wesley to employ "lay-helpers" in cases of necessity. Their office was, "in the absence of a minister, to feed and guide the flock." The Conference also drew up rules for their observance, recommended that they should keep a journal, and added an exhortation to watch against formalism both in themselves and others. The question was also raised of providing a "seminary" for such labourers ; but the project was postponed, the time being not yet come for its efficient realization.

It is evident that neither Wesley nor his friends understood as yet the value and importance of lay-preaching, and the service it was to render to the Methodism of the future. Though already a considerable body, (numbering about fifty,) the lay-helpers were as yet only regarded by Wesley as "extraordinary messengers," whose mission would cease whenever the clergy came under the awakening influence of the Revival. The majority of them still followed their secular calling, while engaged in the labours of an itinerant ministry. They were men of great simplicity and little learning, but full of faith and zeal, and threw themselves into the work that Wesley assigned them with the utmost energy. He had called them into the field, and they willingly accepted his leadership. It was his to regulate their movements, to fix the limits of their Circuits, and generally to superintend their labours. The thirteenth rule of a Helper was as follows : "Act in all things, not according to your own will, but as a son in the Gospel. As



such, it is your part to employ your time in the manner which we direct ; partly, in visiting the flock from house to house, the sick in particular ; partly in such a course of reading, meditation and prayer, as we advise from time to time. Above all, if you labour with us in our Lord's vineyard, it is needful you should do that part of the work which we direct, at those times and places which we judge most for His glory."

The complete obedience that Wesley thus expected from his lay-helpers was necessitated by the claims of the work. He was confiding the care of souls to men who, though endowed with much faith and zeal, were lacking for the most part in mental culture. He was therefore compelled, by the force of circumstances, to accept a kind of episcopal power ; and to it his assistants joyfully submitted. It should also be said that he wielded this power to the great advantage of the preachers as well as people, stimulating their intellectual as well as spiritual activities, directing them in their reading, pointing out the defects in their preaching,—in a word, labouring with all his might to fit them for the important work to which Providence had called them. Nothing can be more interesting than the correspondence he carried on with them. "Your talent in preaching," he writes to one of them, "does not increase. It is just the same as it was seven years ago. It is lively, but not deep ; there is little variety ; there is no compass of thought. Reading only can supply this, with meditation and daily prayer. You wrong yourself greatly by omitting this. You can never be a deep preacher without it, any more than a thorough Christian. O begin ! Fix some part of every day for private exercises. You may acquire the taste you have not : what is tedious at first, will afterwards be pleasant."

Wesley made use of his authority over the preachers, not only to incite them to study but also to encourage them

in their work : he was their personal friend as well as their director. One of them was upon one occasion overwhelmed with doubts respecting his call, and wrote to beg of him to send some one else in his stead, as he did not feel himself to be in his right place. "My dear brother," replied Wesley, "you do indeed appear to me to be out of your place, for the time you have spent in reasoning you ought to have spent in prayer." Such an authority, grounded on such a character and tempered by an overflowing affection and benevolence, could not but command a prompt and cheerful acquiescence ; and it may be truly said that no leader ever had at his disposal a better disciplined and more devoted band.

After spending several days upon the grave questions, occasioned by the Revival, the members of the first Conference separated, and resumed their evangelical labours. This little gathering bore no resemblance to a formal synod : its object was, not to found an ecclesiastical organization, but to determine the best means of reviving the Church and saving souls. Wesley and his friends were, indeed, laying the foundations of a great work, but they appear to have formed no conception of the proportions which that work was to assume.

The past, however, afforded a hopeful augury for the future. In the five years that had elapsed since the commencement of the Revival, its success had surpassed all expectations. Its two great branches, divided by a single doctrinal point, vied with each other in zeal and activity. Still, that of which Wesley was the representative, owing to its superior organization, was rapidly distancing the other. There are no complete statistics of the Methodism of this period. The itinerant preachers numbered, as we have stated, at least fifty ; and the members of Society were counted by thousands. In London alone there were two thousand two hundred.

Every part of England was comprised within the scheme

of Wesley's itinerancy, from Newcastle in the north to Land's End in the extreme south-west. London, Bristol, St. Ives and Newcastle were the centres of the movement: latterly, a new one had been formed at Wednesbury in the Midland district; and the commencement of the work was marked, as we have seen, by violent persecutions. At these various centres Wesley, like his Master, had addressed himself mainly to the most degraded portion of the population, having become a missionary to the London masses, and to the colliers of Kingswood, Staffordshire, and Newcastle. What success had crowned his labours amidst these outcasts of society we have already shown. It was success of the most valuable kind, since it involved not only the reformation of manners but the conversion of souls.

Opposition, indeed, had not been wanting. But the attitude of the English people proved their need of the Gospel, and did not daunt the spirit of the missionary. In these very mobs, embruted by drunkenness and enraged with anger, he could discern susceptible spirits, likely to be as ardent in their good impulses as in those that were leading them astray. It was not by flattery, however, that he sought to tame the savage tyrant accustomed to defy the government itself. Wesley had too lofty a soul to play the courtier, and too much sincerity to say what he did not mean. Even in the midst of an ungovernable mob, he never assumed the tone of a suppliant. The revolution in the sentiments of the people towards him is solely attributable to the moral power he wielded. If, after having been despised and reviled, he came to be beloved and respected by the masses, it was because they felt that his bold and authoritative utterances proceeded from a loving and devoted heart. Frivolous and inconstant in its tastes, as the multitude may be, it knows how to render justice, sooner or later, to those who have loved it and laboured for its good.

Wesley did not find it so easy to excuse the malice of those of his opponents, in whose behalf could not be pleaded the ignorance and prejudice of the mob. The clergy and the magistracy, as we have seen, so far from restraining the madness of the people, often aided and abetted their designs. Their conduct presents one of the most pitiable spectacles that the eighteenth century can furnish,—the magistrate's robe and the minister's surplice soiled by the mire of a street affray. "They encourage the people," said Wesley, "to treat us as persons for whom there is no law, and as so many mad dogs."

This fierce opposition, which had already broken out at the period we have now reached, was to be redoubled in violence ; but the preachers had sustained the first shock, and were now inured to conflict.

The period which may properly be denominated as that of the birth of Methodism terminates at the first Conference, in which its principles were enunciated with such modesty and firmness. We shall next follow the gradual development of the work ; and, in doing so, it will be enough to resume the thread of Wesley's life, for never was workman more thoroughly identified with his work.

## BOOK THIRD.

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### THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WORK.

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(1744—1770.)

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#### CHAPTER I.

##### *CONFLICTS AND SUCCESSES.*

1744—1747.

ENCOURAGED by the prospects of usefulness that lay before him, Wesley resumed his labours with his accustomed zeal. In August, 1744, it was his turn as one of the Fellows to preach before the University of Oxford. An opportunity was thus afforded him, which he did not fail to embrace, of addressing to the dignitaries of the Church, a calm and luminous exposition of the evangelical doctrines, together with a respectful but strongly-worded exhortation to the performance of the special duties that devolved upon them. "I preached," he says in his journal, "I suppose the last time, at St. Mary's. Be it so. I am now clear of the blood of these men. I have fully delivered my own soul."

While he knew how to turn to the best account the few opportunities that were offered him of preaching the Gospel to the higher and better instructed portion of the community, he did not forget that his special mission was to the "little ones." He continued to pursue his missionary journeys,

undeterred even by the rigours of winter. The roads were in those days deplorably neglected, especially in the northern counties. No public conveyance was known beyond the city of York. Wesley had to perform his incessant and protracted journeys on horseback. These ill-kept roads were rendered almost impracticable in winter by the falls of snow or the overflowing of rivers, and more than once he was in danger of losing his life. He often had to dismount and lead his reluctant horse where it could scarcely keep its footing on the ice. In February 1745, he had two very trying journeys. He speaks of them in his journal as follows :—"Many a rough journey have I had before, but one like this I never had ; between wind, and hail, and rain, and ice, and snow, and driving sleet, and piercing cold : but it is past ; those days will return no more, and are, therefore, as though they had never been."

These labours Wesley bore with the utmost equanimity. For such troubles as these he found abundant compensation in the success vouchsafed to his ministry. Besides, he was too much absorbed in his great work, to be distracted by the petty discomforts which necessarily attended it. While on his journeys, he did not confine himself to the work of addressing the multitudes that assembled at every important station on his route : he took advantage of the smallest opportunity for labouring in his Master's cause. As he was riding, he would accost those whom he fell in with, enter into conversation with them, and endeavour to direct their minds to religious subjects. At the table, or in the parlour of the inn where he spent the night, he often contrived to prosecute the great business of his life. His amiable disposition, together with his remarkable conversational powers, caused his society to be eagerly sought : his already wide-spread reputation, and the different opinions current concerning him, excited curiosity ; and persons frequently

came from long distances in order to see and to speak to him. This curiosity, no doubt, did not always spring from sympathy; but none knew better than he did how to disarm malevolence by the mere force of self-possession and simplicity. Of this he gave abundant proof during a tour through Cornwall in the spring of 1745.

The excellent Thompson, rector of St. Gennis, to his honour be it spoken, received him with open arms, offered him the use of his pulpit, and always continued one of his best friends. But the rest of the clergy and the authorities generally gave him a cold reception. The country was up in arms against the Methodists. Maxfield, one of the preachers, had just been arrested under the Vagrancy Act, and was in danger of being impressed into the army, as Nelson and several others had already been. This easy method of getting rid of troublesome preachers appears to have been very popular at that time, and the law allowed too much license to those who made use of it. While endeavouring to interfere on behalf of his friend, Wesley narrowly escaped the same fate. A summons was taken out against him and he was arrested; but such a prisoner could not but be a source of great embarrassment to his enemies, who felt that it would be difficult to pass off as a vagabond, having no visible means of subsistence, a clergyman with so dignified a bearing and so easy an address. He was soon released; but the same day a zealous magistrate interrupted him in his open-air preaching by cries of "Seize him! seize him! I say, seize the preacher for His Majesty's service." As no one appeared ready to obey this order, he seized the preacher by the arm himself and made him his prisoner, but, on reflection, felt ashamed of what he had done, and let him go.

The next day, at Falmouth, Wesley had to encounter, not a vacillating magistrate, but an infuriated populace. He was paying a visit to a sick lady, when "the house," he tells

us, "was beset on all sides by an innumerable multitude of people. A louder or more confused noise could hardly be at the taking of a city by storm. At first Mrs. B. and her daughter endeavoured to quiet them. But it was labour lost. They might as well have attempted to still the raging of the sea. They were soon glad to shift for themselves, and leave K. E. and me to do as well as we could. The rabble roared with all their throats, 'Bring out the Canorum? Where is the Canorum?' (an unmeaning word which the Cornish generally use instead of Methodist.) No answer being given, they quickly forced open the outer door, and filled the passage. Only a wainscot-partition was between us, which was not likely to stand long. I immediately took down a large looking-glass which hung against it, supposing the whole side would fall in at once. When they began their work with abundance of bitter imprecations, poor Kitty was utterly astonished, and cried out, 'O Sir, what must we do?' I said, 'We must pray.' Indeed, at that time, to all appearance, our lives were not worth an hour's purchase. She asked, 'But Sir, is it not better for you to hide yourself? to get into the closet?' I answered, 'No. It is best for me to stand just where I am.' Among those without were the crews of some privateers, which were lately come into the harbour. Some of these, being angry at the slowness of the rest, thrust them away, and, coming up all together, set their shoulders to the inner door, and cried out, 'Avast lads, avast!' Away went all the hinges at once, and the door fell back into the room. I stepped forward at once into the midst of them, and said, 'Here I am. Which of you has anything to say to me? To which of you have I done any wrong? To you? Or you? Or you?' I continued speaking till I came, bare-headed as I was, (for I purposely left my hat that they might all see my face,) into the middle of the street, and then raising my voice, said, 'Neighbours,



countrymen ! Do you desire to hear me speak ?' They cried vehemently, 'Yes, yea. He shall speak. He shall. Nobody shall hinder him.' But having nothing to stand on, and no advantage of ground, I could be heard by few only. However, I spoke without intermission, and, as far as the sound reached, the people were still ; till one or two of their captains turned about and swore not a man should touch him. Mr. Thomas, a clergyman, then came up, and asked, 'Are you not ashamed to use a stranger thus ?' He was soon seconded by two or three gentlemen of the town and one of the aldermen ; with whom I walked down the town, speaking all the time till I came to Mrs. Maddern's house. The gentlemen proposed sending for my horse to the door, and desired me to step in and rest the mean time. But on second thoughts, they judged it not advisable to let me go out among the people again : so they chose to send my horse before me to Penryn, and to send me thither by water ; the sea running close by the back-door of the house in which we were."

As he pursued his journey through Cornwall, Wesley strove to revive the spirit of the Societies which had been somewhat daunted by opposition. Some were in great consternation : here he was informed that the church-wardens and constables were preparing to lay violent hands upon him : there, a body of drunken miners were "coming to do terrible things." "I laboured much," says he, "to compose their minds : but fear had no ears ; so that abundance of people went away. I preached to the rest on, 'Love your enemies.' The event showed this also was a false alarm, an artifice of the devil, to hinder men from hearing the Word of God."

At Tolcarn he had to encounter another assault of the mob, who broke in upon him while preaching in the open air. Wesley was standing on a high wall, and succeeded for some time by his voice and gestures in keeping them

within bounds. But he was thrown down from the wall, and had to give up the service, only too happy to have escaped without serious injury. At Stithians, while he was preaching, the agents of the authorities arrested one of the audience and impressed him into the army. One of the members of the Society at Trewint was driven out of the place ; but the measure only turned to the advantage of the cause, of which this humble Christian became, wherever he went, the faithful defender and advocate. His success was such in every place he visited, that he said, "I never remember so great an awakening in Cornwall, wrought in so short a time, among young and old, rich and poor, from Trewint quite to the sea-side."

Wesley now left Cornwall, and crossed the Channel to Wales, where he found himself in the midst of widely different scenes. "We were here, as it were, in a new world, in peace, and honour, and abundance. How soon should I melt away in this sunshine ! But the goodness of God suffered it not." At this period, in fact, the Principality was, of all parts of England, that in which the Revival had met with the greatest sympathy and the least opposition.

While he was thus pursuing his labours, his coadjutors were vigorously seconding him in the midst of sufferings and struggles that cannot be detailed here. His brother always occupied the fore-front rank, and none plunged into the fight with greater ardour than he. The battle was waging at many points simultaneously, and each soldier bravely did his duty. Wesley was the soul of the movement, animating his fellows with his own intrepid zeal, and setting them the example of a whole-hearted consecration to the cause of God.

The great work responded so completely to the wants of the age, that it seemed to break out spontaneously in places the most remote from each other, and Wesley often

learned with surprise the success of humble and devoted fellow-labourers, of whose very existence he had not been previously aware. About this time, for instance, he received the joyful intelligence that Methodism had found its way into the English army then upon the continent. The war of the Spanish succession had just commenced: England had taken up arms in behalf of Maria Theresa, while France espoused the opposite side. Flanders was the battle-field of the contending armies. Among the English troops there were a few soldiers who had heard the preaching of the Methodists in England, and in whom it had borne fruit. Their piety had ripened amid the dangers of warfare, and their zeal had awakened many of their comrades. John Evans, John Haime, Sampson Staniforth, and Mark Bond, were the leaders of this remarkable movement. They commenced a regular course of evangelical activity which accomplished marvellous results. In most of the regiments numerous conversions took place: the converts formed themselves into little Societies for mutual edification, and their number soon exceeded three hundred. The most intelligent and pious among them became preachers, and the number of these amounted to seven. John Haime, the most energetic of them all, often preached five times a day in various parts of the camp, with the consent of his officers, who released him to a great extent from his military duties, and were in general favourable to his work. At Brussels, the General permitted Haime to preach every day in the English church: the Methodist soldiers marched to the services, and their serious demeanour and joyous psalmody edified all. Other soldiers occupied a place of worship at Ghent.

On April 30th, 1745, at the terrible battle of Fontenoy, the Methodists proved to their comrades that Christian soldiers could die at the post of duty. Four of the preachers and a great number of the members fell on

the field of battle. "I am going to rest on the bosom of Jesus," said one of the wounded to his fellows. "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!" exclaimed another with his last breath. John Evans had both legs cut off by a cannon ball: he was laid across a cannon to die; and, as long as he could speak, he ceased not to praise God and to exhort all those that were about him.

In thus finding its way to the field of battle, Methodism was faithful to its providential mission, as it had already been in its care for the colliers at Kingswood and Newcastle. God was evidently employing its adherents as His messengers to outcasts of every class.

Though a large number of Methodist soldiers lost their lives in the continental campaign, many returned to England, and there united themselves to Wesley's Societies: some of them entered the ranks of his itinerancy. He himself took a deep interest in this remarkable movement, and kept up a constant correspondence with several of these godly soldiers. The joy their letters afforded him was the double joy of the missionary and of the patriot. Of Wesley's patriotism there could be no doubt, and circumstances soon arose which put it to the proof.

In the course of the year 1745, the whole country was thrown into a state of great alarm by the descent on Scotland of the Pretender, Charles Edward Stuart. At first, his arms were attended by some success: he gained possession of Edinburgh, and from thence threatened the north of England. Wesley, who was an Englishman to the backbone, was fully alive to the fact that the success of the Pretender was the success of Popery, and the forerunner of the downfall of his country's liberties. He therefore threw all the weight of his influence and example into the scale of the King's authority and the nation's interests. When tidings came of the invasion, he immediately set out for Newcastle, whose northern position exposed it to the

greatest danger. He desired to share also the fortunes of his brethren, and to comfort and encourage them in their present trying circumstances. On his arrival, he wrote to the mayor a remarkable letter, in which he avows his patriotism and fidelity to the legitimate sovereign. Shortly after, he offered to preach to the soldiers of the garrison, for whose religious wants no provision was made. The commanding officer did not consent to this proposal, and Wesley was obliged to restrict his efforts to his ordinary sphere of labour ; but within these limits he displayed greater zeal than ever, preaching every day in the open air, and drawing important lessons from the great public calamities that were impending. The danger of an assault increased daily, and this tended to solemnize the minds of the people, and furnished the preacher with a subject on which to base the most powerful appeals. These labours were not without results, and the abortive attempt of the Pretender had at least the effect of arousing some souls from religious indifference.

While preaching was Wesley's principal weapon, he was conscious from the first of the power of the press ; and few men have made more use of it than he. During the period we are now describing, he published in succession the two parts of his *Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, an eloquent plea on behalf of the Methodist Revival, in which the noblest sentiments are expressed in remarkably vigorous language. He also wrote short religious tracts, which his preachers distributed by thousands in all parts of Great Britain, and which usefully followed up the work of preaching properly so called. To Wesley belongs the honour of taking the initiative in tract distribution on a large scale, an idea which in modern times has been carried out by influential societies to a wonderful extent.

The rapid development of the work imposed obligations upon Wesley, such as he had never contemplated. He was

called to exercise a kind of spiritual episcopate, not only over his preachers, but also over the numerous Societies of which he was the founder. This burden he bore in the true spirit of apostolic devotion. While prosecuting his evangelical labours, he combined with these a minute attention to the state of the Societies, and maintained among them a strict ecclesiastical discipline. The religious excitement that everywhere accompanied the Revival, necessarily produced varied results, and the most extravagant ideas sometimes sprang up in the wake of this great movement. Many souls that truly hungered and thirsted after righteousness, were led astray by dangerous doctrines, which substituted an unhealthy quietism for the life and warfare of faith. It needed all Wesley's firmness and prudence to prevent the Revival from foundering amid these shoals. He saw the tendency of these currents of thought, and resisted them with all his might. In March, 1746, he perceived that as the result of such doctrines the Nottingham society had sunk into a most unsatisfactory state, and he endeavoured to remedy it at once by a thorough sifting of it. At Wednesbury and Birmingham still greater ravages had been created by false doctrines. Certain Antinomian teachers, under pretence of exalting Christian liberty, had widely circulated the idea of the non-necessity of good works, and of the complete emancipation of the Christian from the obedience due to the law. By some, these dangerous principles had been carried to their extreme issues. Wesley proved, in a public discussion of the whole subject, that such notions opened the door to all kinds of license. To expose these deplorable consequences was the best way to arrest them. In London, Wesley had to contend with a fanatical sect which professed to have received the gift of prophecy and of tongues. It was not difficult to refute these absurd pretensions. One of the so-called prophets tried to talk

Latin, and broke down in the attempt. "The poor man proved to us," said Wesley, "that he at least had mistaken his vocation."

In the spring of 1746, Wesley visited the south-west, where his labours were again greatly blessed. Wales gave him a hearty reception, and Cornwall, which the year before had been the scene of so many trials, seemed to strive to make reparation. He was not once disturbed by the mob, and he had the joy of finding that many of his persecutors had been converted. The Societies were everywhere becoming more consolidated, and there were evident tokens that the work which had been wrought was of a durable kind.

On the return of winter, he set out again for the north, not heeding the rigours of the season, which he had to encounter in all their severity. Most abundantly, indeed, was he compensated for these sufferings by the delightful progress of which he was the witness in the Societies that lay along his route. On the 24th of February, 1747, he writes, "At noon I examined the little Society at Tetney. I have not seen such another in England. In the class-paper (which gives an account of the contribution for the poor) I observed one gave eightpence, often tenpence a week; another thirteen, fifteen, or eighteen pence; another sometimes one, sometimes two shillings. I asked Micah Elmoor, the leader, (an Israelite indeed, who now rests from his labours,) 'How is this? Are you the richest Society in all England?' He answered, 'I suppose not; but all of us who are single persons have agreed together, to give both ourselves and *all we have* to God: and we do it gladly; whereby we are able, from time to time, to entertain all the strangers that come to Tetney: who often have no food to eat, nor any friend to give them a lodging.'" With such adherents Methodism could face the future without fear: its destiny was practically decided.

The northern Societies were, generally, in a prosperous condition. At Newcastle, while perfect harmony reigned among the members, Wesley found that the preaching was appreciated by many beyond the circle of the ordinary congregation, and that prejudice was on the wane even among the upper classes. He visited fresh localities, in which his labours laid the foundations of a permanent work, and placed these new interests under the care of his itinerant preachers, who were themselves continually increasing in number. One of these, John Nelson, whom Wesley met again during the course of this journey, was always distinguishing himself by his Christian heroism as well as by the success that attended his ministry. He had just escaped, as by a miracle, out of the hands of a furious mob at York, who had almost stoned him to death, and left him wallowing on the ground in his own blood. Wesley comforted his valiant colleague, and after a short interview resumed his journey. At Leeds, where Nelson had introduced Methodism, Wesley's preaching awakened a deep interest and drew together multitudes of people. At Keighley, where on a previous visit he had formed a Society of ten members, he found two hundred. At the great manufacturing town of Manchester, he preached to several thousands in the open air. Toward the end of the service he was interrupted by a few individuals, who threatened to bring out the fire-engine and let it play upon him if he did not desist.

This slight misadventure was almost the only one Wesley had to encounter in his northern journey. The popular feeling had become in many places greatly modified in his favour. The outbreaks that did occur were quickly repressed, and that sometimes by the aggressors themselves. Such was the case during a visit which he paid to the south-west in the summer of 1747. "About six in the evening," he writes at Plymouth, on the 27th of June, "I



went to the place where I preached the last year. A little before we had ended the hymn, came the Lieutenant, a famous man, with his retinue of soldiers, drummers, and mob. When the drums ceased, a gentleman-barber began to speak ; but his voice was quickly drowned in the shouts of the multitude, who grew fiercer and fiercer, as their numbers increased. After waiting about a quarter of an hour, perceiving the violence of the rabble still increasing, I walked down into the thickest of them, and took the captain of the mob by the hand. He immediately said, 'Sir, I will see you safe home : Sir, no man shall touch you. Gentlemen, stand off ; give back ! I will knock the first man down that touches him.' We walked on in great peace ; my conductor every now and then stretching out his neck, (he was a very tall man,) and looking round, to see if any behaved rudely, till we came to Mr. Hide's door. We then parted in much love. I stayed in the street near half an hour after he was gone, talking with the people, who had now forgot their anger, and went away in high good humour."

Such incidents as these might be easily multiplied. They prove the almost fascinating power of Wesley's speech and demeanour, of which we have seen so many proofs already. The present tour through the southwestern counties was exceedingly gratifying to Wesley's mind. "How strangely," says he, "has one year changed the scene in Cornwall ! This is now a peaceable, nay, an honourable station. They give us good words almost in every place. What have we done, that the world should be so civil to us ?"

The success vouchsafed to Wesley's labours, could not but encourage him to attempt new enterprises. He had scarcely returned from these tours which had occasioned him so much joy, when he prepared for a campaign which seemed likely to entail much hardship, but to the eye of his faith revealed the prospect of great success. This

episode in his ministry is sufficiently important to demand a separate notice.

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## CHAPTER II.

### *METHODISM IN IRELAND.*

1747—1750.

IRELAND, once called the Isle of Saints, and for a long time the pioneer of missions for the rest of Europe, has long since fallen in the rear of her two sisters, Scotland and England, in a religious point of view. While the latter eagerly embraced the principles of the Reformation of the sixteenth century, Ireland misunderstood and opposed them. This religious inferiority has entailed humiliating social and political disadvantages. A race endowed with great natural gifts has been here arrested in its development by the iron bands of superstition. To this source alone can we refer the long succession of calamities which have made its history one of the most melancholy on record.

A nation seldom retrieves lost opportunities, and Ireland can scarcely hope to overtake the other branches of the United Kingdom. If ever she be regenerated, the Gospel alone must be the instrument of the work. It is to the honour of Wesley that he believed in its possibility, and set himself vigorously to labour for its achievement. Prior to his day, the attempts that had been made to convert Ireland had so much of what was merely political in their character, as to bring them into contempt. The Anglican clergymen, supported by the forced contributions of the Catholics, were generally regarded as the useless functionaries of a persecuting power; and even if they had been men of great

zeal and piety, their connection with the State would have considerably neutralized their influence. Wesley saw that where the clergy were thus doubly disqualified for their work, there was room for the action of his lay-preachers, and that the one might succeed though the other had failed. He arrived at Dublin on Sunday, the 9th of August, 1747, and in the afternoon of the same day was invited to occupy the pulpit of St. Mary's Church. He preached "to as gay and senseless a congregation" as he ever saw. Two days after he waited on the Archbishop of Dublin, who raised "abundance of objections." Wesley replied firmly; but he well knew that, in Ireland as in England, he would have to open a path for himself in spite of the Established Church.

On this first visit, he endeavoured to form a just estimate of the religious wants of Ireland. He observed that "at least ninety-nine in an hundred of the native Irish remain in the religion of their forefathers. The Protestants, whether in Dublin or elsewhere, are almost all transplanted lately from England. Nor is it any wonder," he adds, "that those who are born Papists generally live and die such, when the Protestants can find no better ways to convert them than Penal Laws and Acts of Parliament." His first impressions of the people were of the most favourable kind: he found them much more tractable than the English. "What a nation this is!" he exclaims, "men, women, and children, all receive the word of exhortation not only with patience but thankfulness." Subsequent events sensibly modified this first impression.

Wesley had been preceded here by one of his lay-preachers, Thomas Williams, who in a few months organized in Dublin a Society of nearly three hundred members. According to custom, he inquired into the spiritual state of each individually. He also preached to large audiences, both in the chapel, formerly a Lutheran church, and in the

open air. His preaching was everywhere well received : indeed the enthusiasm of his reception was to him a matter of astonishment. After spending a fortnight in Ireland, he had to leave a people "loving beyond expression," and in doing so determined in future to pay special attention to the spiritual necessities of this neglected country.

A fortnight after his departure, his brother Charles visited Ireland. Within this brief space of time, however, a sudden revolution had taken place in the minds of the Dublin populace. The passions of the mob had broken forth like a storm and fallen with great severity upon the little Society. At the instigation of the priests, the chapel had been sacked by the Roman Catholics, while the pulpit and benches served to make a bonfire : many Methodists had also been insulted and threatened with worse treatment. The authorities, by refusing to interfere, became accomplices in these transactions : the grand jury discharged the rioters who were brought before them, and thus encouraged them to recommence their work, which they did not fail to do. Charles Wesley had to withstand the violent attacks of a populace whose fury led them into unheard-of excesses. More than once, in these encounters, blood flowed and life was wantonly sacrificed, while many were so maltreated that they died in consequence of their injuries. A policeman in attempting to defend Charles Wesley was trampled to death, and his body dragged about the streets and then hung up in a public place by the frenzied crowd. The murderers were brought to trial, but acquitted, "as usual," says Wesley. The faith and courage of the man of God survived all this opposition, and as soon as the persecution came to an end, the work went forward peacefully.

It was no longer confined to Dublin : from this time, the brave preachers went through the length and breadth of the land, and notwithstanding its difficulties their labour

was rewarded with considerable success. Charles Wesley's fine psalmody was greatly in favour with this musical people, and frequently attracted many hearers. Two characteristic anecdotes will show the effect of the Methodist melodies on the Irish mind.

At Wexford, the little Society, persecuted by the Papists, used to meet secretly in a barn. One of the mischievous spirits of the neighbourhood promised his companions to secrete himself in the barn before the service, and as soon as the meeting began, to open the door to them. He found nothing in which to stow himself away, but an old sack. As soon as the singing began, the Irishman was so struck by its power and beauty, that he forgot the object for which he came, and listened to the end. The hymn finished, he listened to the prayer, and his heart, already softened, began to melt. The poor man was smitten with remorse for his folly, his frame shook, and his groans of distress drew the attention of the people to the spot from whence they proceeded. The first thought of the rustic and untutored congregation was, that some diabolical agency was at work, but a closer scrutiny discovered in the sack the unfortunate Irishman, overwhelmed with distress and praying with all his might. An explanation took place : the poor man asked the people to pray for him, and from that day gave proof of sound conversion, and continued a consistent member of the Society at Wexford.

About the same time a publican, a great lover of music, came to one of the services to hear the singing. Fearing the effect that the other parts of the service might have upon him, the poor fellow put his fingers in his ears as soon as the singing ceased. A fly settling on his nose compelled him to remove his hand from his ear, at the very moment that the preacher was uttering the words, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." His curiosity was awakened : he determined to listen a little longer, and the truths of the

Gospel smote his conscience so effectually that he was led to repentance and salvation.

These anecdotes show how rude and uncultivated was the class of people Methodism had to do with in Catholic Ireland. Here superstition was added to ignorance, and created obstacles which must always largely militate against the progress of the truth. Happily, beneath these prejudices there lay a generous and susceptible nature, easily accessible to the Gospel, when preached in its simplicity and power.

On his second visit to Ireland, which took place in March, 1748, John Wesley met with a most hearty reception. Arriving at Dublin, he went immediately to the place of worship where his brother Charles was meeting the Society. He began to speak, but for some moments his voice was drowned by the noise of this demonstrative people, "shouting and praising God." During the three months that he spent in Ireland, he traversed a great part of the country, preaching every morning at five o'clock, and in general enjoying the goodwill of the people. The storm that had burst upon the Society seemed to have had no other result than to purify the atmosphere.

Wherever Wesley went, he preached in the open air to attentive congregations, composed of Catholics as well as Protestants. At Athlone, he addressed an immense crowd from a window. The majority of them were Catholics, and their eagerness to hear the Word was such as to occasion the following remarks in his journal: "I scarce ever saw a better behaved or more attentive congregation. Indeed, so civil a people as the Irish in general, I never saw, either in Europe or America." Two days after, the appearance of the people astonished him still more: "a great part of the congregation was in tears." "Almost all the town," he says, "appeared to be moved, full of goodwill and desires of salvation." But he was not deceived

by such manifestations. "The waters," said he, "spread too wide to be deep." From that time he took knowledge of the special difficulties of the Irish character, so frank and yet so fickle.

He was not at all satisfied with the mere good-will of the people, however unanimous, and he laboured to strike at the foundation of the religious indifference which lay concealed beneath this comely exterior. To this end, he altered the style of his preaching, and endeavoured to bring before their minds the terrors of the law. "I preached," he says, "the terrors of the Lord in the strongest manner I was able. But still they who are ready to eat up every word, do not appear to digest any part of it." Notwithstanding, he was greatly encouraged at Athlone, and laid the foundations of a prosperous Society. When the time came for him to leave, he found the greatest difficulty in parting from a people so full of affection and respect: a multitude all in tears accompanied him, and the farewell scene was most affecting. The great preacher, whose life was full of similar scenes, was himself deeply touched.

In every place he witnessed the same tenderness of feeling. At Philipstown, he found a small Society, formed in great part of the soldiers in the garrison, whose disposition was most admirable. At Clara, the first time he preached, he had a congregation composed principally of wealthy people, some of whom came in their carriages. On a subsequent occasion, he successfully competed with one of the most popular national sports, a "famous cock-fight, to which almost all the country was coming, from every side....One or two hundred," he says, "stopped, and listened awhile, and forgot their diversion." At Limerick, a ball had commenced in the place where he was to hold his service. Though advised to desist, he kept his ground, and, one after another, the dancers abandoned their design

and joined his congregation. At Tullamore, a violent hail-storm came on while he was preaching to an immense multitude in the open air ; and not only did none go away, but the majority remained bare-headed, though Wesley bade them put on their hats.

He frequently had priests among his hearers ; and they generally declared war against him. The Athlone priest came to restrain his people from following the great missionary, and a considerable number of them allowed themselves like a flock of good sheep to be driven away to their pen. The Protestants generally took his part against the priests, and when one day a Carmelite friar interrupted him, by exclaiming, " You lie ! you lie !" the Protestants, zealous for the honour of their religion, put the monk to flight. More than once, however, the Protestants joined with the Roman Catholics in opposing the progress of this new work. On the other hand, on one occasion, Wesley had the honour of being defended by a priest. This happened at one of his open-air services, when the various feelings of the populace were naturally manifested in greater freedom. A Protestant repeated the old slander, calling out, " Ay, he is a Jesuit ; that's plain !" A priest who was present, replied, with a loud voice, " No, he is not ; I would to God he was !"

When Wesley quitted Ireland, he left a number of Societies fully organized, and a considerable body of preachers. His brother, who shortly afterwards assumed the superintendence of this part of the field, visited Cork, an important town in the south-west, which was to become the battle-field of Irish Methodism. His success was great at first : he had congregations amounting to ten thousand, and formed a Society of two hundred members, whose religious character he complained of, however, as being too superficial. But whatever the work may have lacked in solidity, it was about to acquire by the aid of persecution.



The people soon changed their minds, and, with true Irish versatility, passed from friendliness to fury. Charles Wesley had hardly left the town, when the people rose against the Methodists, under the leadership of a travelling comedian named Butler, whose audiences had been thinned by the preaching. This mountebank preached a crusade against the Christians : he was to be seen in the streets of the city, robed in clerical attire, and holding in his hand a Bible and a packet of profane songs : he assembled the idle and dissolute of every class, and vented all sorts of absurd calumnies against the preachers. Being gifted with a certain amount of loquacity, this buffoon became a noted personage in Cork, and for some time, by means of his furious declamations and unscrupulous falsehoods, gained a complete ascendancy over the minds of the lower orders. Led astray by his misrepresentations, they committed unpardonable outrages. Companies of men, armed with bludgeons and swords, patrolled the city and broke into the houses of the Methodists : men, women, and children, suspected of belonging to the hated sect, were attacked in the street by armed bands, and many of them seriously injured. The common cry in the street was, "Five pounds for the head of a swaddler !" \*

The mayor encouraged these disorders. In vain did the persecuted people appeal to him for protection : to one of them, who complained that the rioters had plundered his house, his reply was, "It is your own fault for entertaining these preachers ! If you will turn them out of your house, I will engage there shall be no harm done, but if you will not turn them out, you must take what you will get." This ill-timed speech, made in the presence of the mob,

\* "A name given to Mr. Cennick first, by a Popish priest, who heard him speak of a child wrapped in swaddling clothes ; and probably did not know the expression was in the Bible, a Book he was not much acquainted with."

was like oil thrown on the flames, and could only serve to rouse the worst passions. Butler took advantage of them to continue his senseless declamations : he publicly declared that the murder of the Methodists was a lawful and meritorious act.

The ordinary tribunals did not dare to take up the cause of the oppressed. Not only did they acquit the persecutors, but they also accused the persecuted. The city records still preserve the following remarkable presentment, "We find and present Charles Wesley to be a person of ill-fame, a vagabond, and a common disturber of His Majesty's peace, and we pray he may be transported." The Methodists appealed to a higher court, and obtained full justice from the King's judges. When Butler presented himself as the first witness in the case, to the question, "What is your calling?" he replied, "I sing ballads." "Here," exclaimed the judge, lifting up his hands indignantly, "here are six gentlemen indicted as vagabonds, and the first accuser is a vagabond by profession!"

Notwithstanding this acquittal, the reign of the mob continued ; and when, in 1750, John Wesley came to Cork, he was assailed with terrible violence. The mayor, whose protection he sought, contented himself with ordering the drums of the city to be beaten in front of the chapel all the while the service lasted. This ingenious method of "keeping the peace" had the effect of assembling the multitude. After falling upon Wesley, who displayed his usual presence of mind, they attacked the chapel, "brought out all the seats and benches, tore up the floor, the door, the frames of the windows, and whatever of woodwork remained ; part of which they carried off for their own use, and the rest they burnt in the open street." The next day, Wesley had the honour of being burnt in effigy in the streets of Cork.

From this time, the scandalous scenes which disgraced

the city two years before were daily repeated. Not a day passed without fresh attacks on persons or property. "One Roger O'Ferrall fixed up an advertisement at the public Exchange, that he was ready to head any mob, in order to pull down any house that should dare to harbour a swaddler."

The mayor made use of a singular device, by means of which he seemed to discharge his duty, but in reality abandoned the Methodists to the ill-will of the mob. One day his help being solicited, he came to the scene of tumult with a party of soldiers, and said to the mob, "Lads, once, twice, thrice, I bid you go home : now I have done." He then went back, taking the soldiers with him, while the people were only too well satisfied with the encouragement thus given them by the first magistrate of the city.

At Bandon, a neighbouring town, a drunken clergyman came with a company of "lewd fellows of the baser sort" to interrupt the preaching. "After I had spoke," he says, "about a quarter of an hour, a clergyman, who had planted himself near me, with a very large stick in his hand, according to agreement, opened the scene....But, before he had uttered many words, two or three resolute women, by main strength, pulled him into a house; and, after expostulating a little, sent him away through the garden."

The agitation which had prevailed so long at Cork, gradually decreased and disappeared before the firmness of Christians whom tribulation had only fortified. A great number of the soldiers of the garrison frequented the services : many of them were converted, and their presence at the meetings tended to keep evil-disposed persons in awe.

Well-tempered by persecution, Methodism achieved much success in Cork, where it flourishes still. At subsequent visits, Wesley found the dispositions of the people greatly changed toward him : he was received at the principal

hotel by the mayor in person. So rapidly, indeed, did Methodism gain ground in Cork, that only five years after the persecution we have been narrating, Wesley dreaded this city as the Capua where his preachers were in danger of being enervated.

Similar progress was made simultaneously at many points all over Ireland. Not only the southern counties, but also the mountainous districts of Ulster were evangelized by devoted missionaries, whose zeal made light of hardship and danger. They gave their best service to the best of causes. The history of early Methodism in Ireland is full of acts of heroism, which show to what a pitch of disinterested zeal the soul may be elevated under the influence of a lively faith. One of the first leaders in this holy enterprise well-nigh fell a martyr to his Christian principles: his name was Macburney, and he suffered for months in consequence of the wounds he received from a mob who resented his faithful preaching. "May God forgive you! I do," was his prayer, uttered on their behalf, while they were trampling him under their feet.

In preaching to Irish Catholics, Wesley's preachers, like himself, had wisdom enough to avoid controversy respecting Romanist errors, and to confine themselves mainly to the leading truths of the Gospel. Striving thus to arouse the voice of conscience rather than to combat the prejudices of education, they succeeded in leading many Roman Catholics to Christ.

One of the converts, Thomas Walsh, became the apostle of Methodism in his own country. "His life," says Southey, "proved to the Catholics that there were other saints besides their own." The success which attended his ministry was as much due to holy living and to the charm of a genial disposition as to the gifts of his cultivated intellect. While his success was great, his trials were, if possible, greater: the priests vowed vengeance against

him, and roused the passions of the people by the denunciations which they hurled at this holy man of God : his life was often in jeopardy. His name remains indissolubly connected with the foundation of Methodism in Ireland.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### *RAPID PROGRESS.*

1748—1760.

WE shall now resume the narration of Wesley's labours in England. Some sympathy began now to be declared towards him on the part of a few of the Anglican clergy, the great body of whom were still, as from the first, exceedingly bitter in their opposition. During the period embraced by the present chapter, Wesley received very valuable assistance from John Hodges, Henry Piers, Samuel Taylor, and John Meriton, all of whom were present at his first Conference. Bateman, the Rector of the Church of St. Bartholomew, London, opened his pulpit to him, in spite of the umbrage he thereby gave to his brethren in the ministry ; and the inhabitants of the metropolis were surprised to hear from the sacred desk truths that for the most part were only announced in the public places.

The excellent Thompson, Rector of St. Gennis, Cornwall, was also one of Wesley's best friends, and rendered him great service amid the persecutions which raged in that county. All the clergy of that diocese were up in arms against him, and his bishop, the fiery Lavington, on

one occasion threatened to unfrock him, if he continued to associate with Wesley. Thompson stripped off his robe and threw it at the prelate's feet, saying, "I can preach without a gown."

An equally devoted fellow-labourer was Vincent Perronet, Vicar of Shoreham, one of Wesley's most intimate friends. What manner of man he was, may be inferred from the fact that he preferred that his sons should encounter the hardships and perils of Wesley's itinerancy rather than court the honours and advantages of the Church. A man of sound judgment and of great faith, he was the Mentor of the Methodist preachers, to whom his house and his church were always open. Charles Wesley called him his Archbishop.

William Grimshaw, Incumbent of Haworth, in Yorkshire, was still more closely connected with the work of the Revival. Retaining the charge of his parish, he became one of Wesley's auxiliaries, and took the direction of one of his Circuits. He was a most valuable "fellow-helper to the truth," sharing the privations as well as the success of the Methodist preachers. When Wesley visited Yorkshire, Grimshaw acted as his guide, and valiantly encountered all the hardships to which his friend was exposed. In August, 1748, in particular, they had to bear the brunt of a most determined attack on the part of the populace. This was at Roughlee, on the confines of Grimshaw's parish. Wesley was preaching in the open air, when he was interrupted by a furious multitude, who surrounded and laid violent hands upon him. In the course of the affray he received several heavy blows, and was in danger of losing his life. A magistrate required him to promise never to show himself there again. Wesley replied courageously, "I would sooner cut off my hand, than make any such promise." Abandoned to the mercy of a maddened mob, he had to endure every species of

insult : he was covered with mud and dung, and repeatedly thrown on the ground. The friends who accompanied him were subjected to worse treatment still : one of them was dragged by the hair of his head, another thrown into the river. Grimshaw himself was not spared, and received at that time a baptism of persecution which was repeated again and again.

A few years later, in 1757, God gave Wesley a new auxiliary among the ranks of the clergy, in the person of the excellent Fletcher, a man whose influence on Methodism was very considerable. John William de la Fléchère,\* by the nobleness of his character, the holiness of his life, and the range of his talents, was one of the most influential leaders of the Revival of the eighteenth century. He was not satisfied with giving his sanction to the movement : he was fully identified with it, and became one of its most intrepid and useful champions. His name is indissolubly linked with that of Wesley, and remains one of the brightest and purest stars in that constellation of men whom God raised up to illuminate England.

The alliance of men of such worth consoled Wesley greatly under the opprobrium heaped upon him by the mass of the clergy. He did not as yet relinquish the hope of rallying the whole body of them round the standard of the Revival. Hence, in 1756, he issued an "Address to the Clergy," an eloquent manifesto in which he sought to rouse the ranks of his brethren in orders from their indifference, and to conciliate their goodwill. The attempt did not succeed, and the clergy maintained their hostile attitude.

Though the Revival failed to win any sympathy from the

\* Fletcher was born at Nyon, in the Canton de Vaud, and Perronet belonged to Chateau d'Oex, in the same country. It is remarkable that French Switzerland should have furnished to English Methodism two of its most devoted supporters.

regular clergy, who could not comprehend the marvellous work that was in progress under their very eyes, abundant compensation was to be found in the success which was being achieved in all parts of the United Kingdom. Wesley's journals show how he continued to scour the country in all directions throughout the period embraced by this chapter. It is impossible to follow him through these incessant missionary tours ; it will suffice to cull a few facts in passing, and to take a rapid survey of the whole.

Cornwall continued to be one of the most interesting sections of Wesley's vast diocese, and one which claimed a large proportion of his labours. St. Just could boast the largest Society in the West of England, and "the liveliest in England." At Falmouth, Camelford, and many other places, those who had been persecutors had almost to a man become devoted adherents, and some of them sound converts ; among the rest, the man who had been the means of imprisoning Thomas Maxfield. At Breage, the clergyman who had circulated slanderous reports against Wesley and his people, had committed suicide, and the populace, regarding the event as in some sort a Divine judgment, had begun to entertain different feelings toward the Methodists. The latter also reckoned among them many gifted and zealous preachers, both itinerant and local. One of these, a brazier by trade, astonished Wesley by his oratorical ability : he said of him that "he could preach extempore sermons which were quite equal to the written discourses of some learned men."

Scotland, which Wesley visited for the first time in 1751, gave him small encouragement. Whitefield had warned him that his Arminian principles would not be relished by the Scotch people, to which Wesley replied that he should "preach Christianity, not Arminianism." His congregations were everywhere very attentive, but very cold. On his



second visit, he preached in the pulpits of the Presbyterian Church to large audiences : everywhere he was treated with great respect, although with a degree of reserve which almost led him to express a preference for the hootings and stone-throwing of an English or Irish mob. These visits resulted in the formation of a few small Societies, but were not marked by those wide-spread and powerful movements which usually attended his ministry. This want of success was probably due in part to the peculiarities of the Scotch character, but still more to its superior spiritual enlightenment : the truth was there invested with less novelty than in England, and there was less necessity for a great religious revolution.

In England itself, the state of affairs contrasted strongly with that which we have already described as distinguishing the period prior to the Revival ; and Wesley could say, even at so early a date as 1750, that from London to Newcastle the work was in full prosperity.

At Birmingham, where hitherto there had been more occasion for sorrow than rejoicing, he found immense congregations, far beyond the capacity of the chapel to contain, thirsting for the Word of Life. "O how is the scene changed here !" says he. "The last time I preached at Birmingham the stones flew on every side. If any disturbance were made now, the disturber would be in more danger than the preacher."

At Wednesbury and Darlaston, those strongholds of opposition, he observed that the principal part of the ancient persecutors had been overtaken by surprising judgments from God, while those who survived "were now," says Wesley, "as lambs." In the former of these towns he preached in the midst of heavy rain to an attentive congregation, not one of whom stirred till the end of the service. A new and large chapel was soon built here, and Wednesbury became one of the strongest centres

of Methodism. In 1752, he preached in the church at Wakefield, and could not but draw a contrast between his present position and that which he had occupied four years before in the same town, when the most devoted of his adherents did not dare to permit him to preach in their houses, for fear the latter should be demolished by the crowd.

An equally remarkable change had taken place in the disposition of the people at Hull. On his first visit, in 1752, there was a general unloosing of the evil passions of the mob. While he was preaching in the open air, clods of earth and stones were showered about him. When he had done, the mob followed him with hootings and volleys of stones till he reached his lodgings. A few years after, the feeling was completely changed, and he had the most cordial reception among the people. This town, also, became an important centre of English Methodism.

At Chester, in 1752, Wesley preached near the ruins of the chapel which the mob had destroyed some time before with the connivance of the mayor. There was no interruption while the preacher expounded the principles of the "sect everywhere spoken against." The year following, when he revisited the city, matters had become still better: the new mayor was as firm as the former one had been lax, and order was thoroughly reestablished. The preaching of the Gospel did the rest, and when, in 1759, Wesley passed that way at the time of the annual races, he turned the circumstance to account, and secured a numerous and well-behaved audience.

At Charlton, the opposition had been of a different kind, but here too it was conquered. All the farmers of the neighbourhood, alarmed at the progress of Methodism, entered into a mutual engagement not to employ any one belonging to "that way." This arrangement was defeated in the best possible manner. One of the promoters of the

scheme was not long after himself convinced by the truth, and opened his house to the preachers. He invited his friends and their servants to the meetings. "So," says Wesley, "the whole device of Satan fell to the ground; and the Word of God grew and prevailed."

At Hornby, the Methodists were treated in the same way. Their employers dismissed them from their service, declaring that they would not engage them again unless they would consent to abandon the preaching. But they remained faithful, willing to renounce their worldly advantages rather than their faith. When Wesley visited them, he found them in the same mind. They had built some small houses at one end of the town, where they lived together, in number about thirty or forty, forming a small Christian community of their own.

In the large town of Manchester, where, owing to the connivance of the authorities, the preachers had suffered much from the violence of the mob, Wesley found that all was calmness and sobriety.

It was during this period that he paid his first visit to another of the great Northern towns. Liverpool, which contains to-day half-a-million of people and is one of the chief towns in the kingdom, was then in its infancy. Although it was impossible for Wesley to foresee the marvellous proportions it was destined to attain, he nevertheless predicted for it a great future, and took the first opportunity that offered itself of preaching the Gospel there. This was in April, 1755: he found that already a flourishing Society had been formed, and a large chapel built through their exertions. The people also were generally tolerant and well-affected: their behaviour was "friendly," Wesley says, "not only to the Jews and Papists who live among them, but even to the Methodists."

At Keighley, where the preachers had endured violent persecution, Wesley preached with all freedom, and nearly

the whole of the town came under the influence of the truth. This success recalled to his mind the time when John Nelson was imprisoned in this town, and he thanked God for the progress that had been made in the interval.

At York, whence Methodism had once been ignominiously expelled, Wesley found the "richest Society in proportion in all the kingdom."

At Sheffield, where there had also been great opposition, his admiration was excited at the sight of the little Society which, left to itself for so long a time, had made such progress in religion under its lay-leaders.

In December, 1748, Wesley visited for the first time a small society at Wandsworth, near London, which being exposed to all the fury of an unmerciful mob and the contempt of an unjust magistracy, had been well-nigh broken up. Nine years later, a planter from the West Indies, called Gilbert, who had come to reside there, received him into his house. His preaching was the means of the conversion of two negroes, who were shortly after baptized. These were the first of the African race whom Methodism brought to a saving acquaintance with the Gospel: they were the first-fruits of a large harvest. These conversions rejoiced Wesley's heart, and he writes in his journal, "Shall not His saving health be made known to all nations?" He scarcely dreamed when he wrote these words, that they would prove to be prophetic, and that this planter himself, Nathaniel Gilbert, as a local preacher, was to introduce Methodism to the black population of the West Indies.

In his native town of Epworth, Wesley had the joy of seeing the work of God prosper. There also, prejudice had vanished away. The man who, a few years before, had been repulsed from the Lord's table, now ministered at it within the walls of the same church; and when he preached abroad, he had almost the whole of the population for his hearers. "I see plainly," he says, "we have often judged

amiss, when we have measured the increase of the work of God, in this and other places, by the increase of the Society only. The Society here is not large ; but God has wrought upon the whole place. Sabbath-breaking and drunkenness are no more seen in these streets ; cursing and swearing are rarely heard. Wickedness hides its head already. Who knows but, by-and-by, God may utterly take it away ? ”

Wesley always rejoiced to visit Newcastle : his Societies there grew and multiplied in the midst of difficulties of all kinds : everything tended to strengthen him in the conviction that his labour had not been in vain.

We have seen how in many instances the evil dispositions which he had at first to encounter gave place to better feelings. Mobs became less frequent and less difficult to subdue : Wesley often succeeded in gaining the upper hand through the influence of those on whom his preaching had produced beneficial effects. By degrees, respectable people, who had only been misled by false reports into taking part with the rioters, were restored to a sense of propriety and a peaceable temper, and thus served as a rallying point to the missionary. The unruly ones often found antagonists in those on whose support they had confidently reckoned. At times, the opponents of the night before, wearied out if not quite vanquished, quietly ranged themselves among the audience of the next morning. The irresolution, also, of the mob frequently betrayed itself in such a way as to lead to an easy victory. After visiting the public-house of the neighbourhood, they would set out with drums beating and flags flying, promising themselves that this time they would make such an example of the preacher that he would never wish to set foot in that part of the country again. Wesley would advance to meet them, shake hands with the leaders of the mob, speak a few kind words to them, and finally ask them

to join his congregation, which they not unfrequently did, so well pleased were they with the unexpected salutation. Sometimes he contented himself with sending one of his friends, not even doing them the honour of interrupting the service on their account. Such was the case on one occasion at Reading, and the plan was quite successful. A large number of bargemen had assembled to interrupt the preaching. One of the friends, a Mr. Richards, came up and accosted them, and asked "if they would go with him and hear a good sermon, telling them, I would make room for you, if you were as many more. They said they would go with all their hearts. 'But neighbours,' said he, 'would it not be as well to leave those clubs behind you? Perhaps some of the women may be frightened at them?' They threw them all away," and came quietly to the preaching. At the end of the sermon, their captain, who was a head taller than his fellows, rose, and looking round upon the congregation, said, "The gentleman says nothing but what is good: I say so; and there is not a man here that shall dare to say otherwise."

The populace were not always, however, so easily subdued. In many places their malevolence continued unabated, especially where it was fostered by the civil or religious authorities. At Shepton, for example, the mob, assembled by the beating of a drum, surrounded the house at which Wesley was staying, and broke all the windows. One of the ringleaders succeeded in effecting an entrance; but, being separated from his friends, his courage failed, and he did not know what to do. A stone thrown from without struck him on his forehead, and inflicted a severe wound, whereupon he became exceedingly alarmed, and kept as close as possible to Wesley, saying, "O, Sir, are we to die to-night? What must I do? What must I do?" "Pray to God," was the reply, "He is able to deliver you from all danger." The poor fellow took this

advice, and began praying as he had never prayed before. While the mob were busy considering how to set the house on fire, Wesley succeeded in making his escape by a back door.

At Bolton, Wesley extricated himself from a similarly embarrassing situation by means of one of those happy inspirations which are so frequent in his history. "We had no sooner entered the main street," he says, "than we perceived the lions at Rochdale were lambs in comparison of those at Bolton. Such rage and bitterness I scarce ever saw before in any creatures that bore the form of men. They followed us in full cry to the house where we went; and as soon as we were gone in, took possession of all the avenues to it, and filled the street from one end to the other.... But they did not design to carry on the attack at a distance: presently one ran up and told us, the mob had burst into the house.... Believing the time was now come, I walked down into the thickest of them. They had now filled all the rooms below. I called for a chair. The winds were hushed, and all was calm and still. My heart was filled with love, my eyes with tears, and my mouth with arguments. They were amazed, they were ashamed, they were melted down, they devoured every word. What a turn was this! O how did God change the counsel of the old Ahithophel into foolishness, and bring all the drunkards, swearers, Sabbath-breakers, and mere sinners in the place to hear of His plenteous redemption!"

While he could, if necessary, be bold as a lion, he could also manifest the sweetness and gentleness of a lamb. He could forgive as well as suffer injury, a power without which he could never have conquered the mob. At Dewsbury, a man overflowing with rage broke through the serried ranks of his audience, and, coming up to the preacher, struck him with all his might on the side of his

face. The blow was so violent as to bring tears into his eyes ; but without a moment's hesitation, Wesley, according to Christ's precept, turned the other cheek. Amazed and confounded, the fierce assailant fell back, and sought to hide his face. From that time he became the devoted friend of the Methodists, and on a subsequent occasion risked his life to save one of their chapels from destruction.

Meanwhile, the success of the movement had become unquestionable. The Revival was no longer a delicate germ lodged in a few faithful hearts : it was already a vigorous and flourishing tree, destined to attain the most ample proportions. In the midst of this general prosperity there were some less pleasing features. Some of the Societies were infested with doctrinal and other errors, and with graver evils, which the moral condition of the nation explains though it cannot justify. Against these, Wesley contended with all his might. Along the coast, lax notions prevailed as to the rights of property : smuggling and wrecking were considered perfectly lawful by these untutored people, many of whom gained their living by such means. To reform such practices required time. By pointing out to his hearers the real character of these offences, and rigidly excluding from his Societies all who were addicted to them, Wesley did more for the suppression of such abuses than either the police or the customs.

Whenever Wesley heard of any disorder breaking out in a Society, he immediately hastened to visit it. At Bristol, owing to the exercise of discipline and some internal troubles, the number of members was reduced by one half. To remedy this state of things, he appointed a special fast, and, as a consequence, a revival took place which fully healed the breach. The Norwich Society had collapsed through the defection of a preacher : with very great difficulty, he succeeded in raising a new cause. In



Lancashire, a similar occurrence led to a schism which was deeply painful to Wesley's mind.

Another source of anxiety was the zeal with which certain false teachers strove to undermine the faith. Disputes more curious than useful, and debates on theological subjects, sprang up in various places and distracted the minds of the people from vital and practical godliness. Wesley was not long in declaring open war with the authors of the mischief: he knew full well that if once this spirit was allowed to reign in the Societies, it would soon put an end to their existence. Staffordshire suffered most from these evils: the Antinomian teachers made great havoc in that district. "What a work would have been in all these parts," exclaims Wesley, "if it had not been for doubtful disputations! If the Predestinarians had not thrown back those who began to run well, partly into the world, partly to the Baptists, and partly into endless disputes concerning the secret counsels of God! While we carried our lives in our hands, none of these came near; the waves ran too high for them; but when all was calm, they poured in on every side, and bereaved us of our children."

These ultra-Calvinists professedly followed Whitefield, but they carried his doctrine to unwarrantable lengths, and deduced from it practical consequences which he would have indignantly condemned. Wesley was himself perfectly at one with his former fellow-labourer. Their hearts were too profoundly Christian to remain divided. They exchanged pulpits, and frequently visited each other. "Mr. Whitefield," he wrote, during a visit to London, "called upon me. Disputings are now no more: we love one another, and join hand in hand to promote the cause of our common Master." Wesley frequently met the leaders of Calvinistic Methodism: on one occasion he preached before them at the house of Lady Huntingdon, and administered the Lord's Supper: among the communicants

were Whitefield, Madan, Romaine, Venn, Griffith Jones, and others.

When he reflected on the labours of these men of God, and of those immediately connected with himself, Wesley could not but be profoundly thankful for the great things God had wrought in the land. This sentiment finds expression in his journal about this time. "From a deep sense of the amazing work which God has of late years wrought in England, I preached in the evening on those words, 'He hath not dealt so with any nation,' (Psalm cxlvii. 20 ;) no, not even with Scotland or New England. In both these God has indeed made bare His arm ; yet not in so astonishing a manner as among us. This must appear to all who impartially consider : 1. The numbers of persons on whom God has wrought. 2. The swiftness of His work in many, both convinced and truly converted in a few days. 3. The depth of it in most of these, changing the heart as well as the whole conversation. 4. The clearness of it, enabling them boldly to say, 'Thou hast loved me ; Thou hast given Thyself for me.' 5. The continuance of it. God has wrought in Scotland and New England, at several times, for some weeks or months together ; but among us, He has wrought for near eighteen years together, without any observable intermission. Above all, let it be remarked, that a considerable number of the regular clergy were engaged in that great work in Scotland ; and in New England above an hundred, perhaps as eminent as any in the whole province, not only for piety, but also for abilities, both natural and acquired ; whereas in England there were only two or three inconsiderable clergymen, with a few young, raw, unlettered men ; and these opposed by well-nigh all the clergy as well as laity in the nation. He that remarks this must needs own, both that this is a work of God, and that He hath not wrought so in any other nation."

Wesley had now reached middle age, without losing

anything of the ardour and activity of youth. He travelled at least five thousand miles a year, for the most part on horseback, without the least regard to inclemency of weather. He preached twice or thrice a day, and invariably conducted a service at five o'clock in the morning, all the year round. While traversing all the counties in England, he read works of every description : theology, history, literature, science, all had an interest for him, and he could at any time draw upon the resources thus accumulated ; his literary tastes were as strong as ever, the classical writers of antiquity being still his favourite study. Very few men were more widely read than Wesley : the observations on his reading which abound throughout his journals indicate an independent and, generally speaking, a sound and accurate judgment.

Endowed with a happy disposition, he lightly bore the weight of occupations so numerous that the catalogue seems incredible. Ten thousand cares, he assures us, troubled him no more than ten thousand hairs on his head. All contemporaneous witnesses agree in describing him as possessed of a sweet serenity of mind that seemed to communicate itself to all who came in contact with him. Alexander Knox, who, though not a follower of Wesley's, was for twenty years his intimate friend, says, "His countenance as well as conversation expressed an habitual gaiety of heart, which nothing but conscious virtue and innocence could have bestowed. He was in truth, the most perfect specimen of moral happiness I have ever seen, and my acquaintance with him taught me better than anything else I have seen or heard or read, except in the sacred Volume, what a heaven upon earth is implied in the maturity of Christian piety."

The simplicity and frugality of his habits enabled him to bear with ease privations and crosses which to ordinary men would have been intolerable. By dint of economy,

he succeeded in keeping his expenses within such moderate limits that he was no burden to the Societies: indeed, he accepted nothing from them but the humble hospitality offered him while on his journeys. His publications, however, were a source of revenue which gradually increased as the progress of Methodism enlarged the circle of his readers. But this multiplication of his resources only furnished him with the means of multiplying his liberalities. While he had thirty pounds a year, he lived on twenty-eight, and gave away forty shillings. The next year receiving sixty pounds, he still lived on twenty-eight, and gave away two-and-thirty. The third year he received ninety pounds, and gave away sixty-two. The fourth year he received one hundred and twenty pounds. Still he lived as before on twenty-eight, and gave to the poor ninety-two. It is calculated that in the course of his life he gave away thirty thousand pounds. His mode of life was so simple that when the collectors of taxes applied to him, supposing that so considerable a personage must have a large quantity of plate, he replied as follows:—"I have two silver tea-spoons at London and two at Bristol: that is all the plate I possess at present, and I shall not buy more while so many of the poor want bread around me."

Wesley had long thought that the itinerant character of his ministry necessitated his renouncing the idea of marriage. Celibacy was attractive to him, and in a pamphlet entitled, "*Thoughts on a Single Life*," he recommended it to all those who could devote themselves to it "for the kingdom of heaven's sake." His opinions on this subject underwent some modifications, and he was led to seek a companion for life. His thoughts first turned toward a widow lady residing at Newcastle, who appears to have possessed all the qualities necessary for his happiness. Unfortunately, several friends, among whom must

be mentioned Charles Wesley and Whitefield, somewhat hastily interfered, in such a way as to prevent the consummation of his wishes. Wesley felt deeply, and for some time gave up all thoughts of marriage.

Perronet, his counsellor and friend, brought the subject before him again in 1751, and introduced him to a Mrs. Vizelle, also a widow lady, who appeared likely to make a suitable partner.

Wesley entered too heartily into his friend's views, and too precipitately asked the lady's hand. His offer was accepted, and the marriage took place. By this step he was, however, far from intending to circumscribe his sphere of labour. Hence, in the arrangements preceding the marriage he expressly refused to have any control over his wife's fortune, and also stipulated that he should not be obliged to preach one sermon or to travel one mile less than he had been accustomed to do. "If I thought it would be otherwise," said Wesley to the lady herself, "much as I love you, I would see your face no more."

Unhappily, in giving her consent to this arrangement, Mrs. Wesley promised more than she was able to perform, and experience showed her husband that he had committed an irreparable error. All her good qualities were, in fact, neutralized by one great fault, viz., jealousy. Incapable of comprehending the loftiness and purity of her husband's spirit and aims, she allowed herself to be misled by her imagination into the most absurd and outrageous suspicions. Finding that she could not induce him to adopt a sedentary life, which he would have deemed a flagrant violation of his special mission, she gave free course to her evil temper and her evil thoughts. Under the dominion of this unworthy passion, she sometimes travelled a distance of a hundred miles in order to watch him as he entered a town, and to see who was travelling with him. She opened his letters, searched his private papers, and sometimes

handed them over to his enemies, in the hope of affixing some stigma upon his character.

This monomania so blinded the unfortunate woman, that more than once she left her husband's roof, and only returned at his earnest solicitation. At last, however, she took her final leave, carrying with her a portion of her husband's papers, and declaring she would never come back. This time the severance was complete. Wesley, who for twenty years had endured a daily martyrdom, wrote in his journal the following note. "January 23d, 1771.—For what cause I know not to this day,—set out for Newcastle, purposing 'never to return.' *Non eam reliqui : non dimisi : non revocabo.*" \*

"Thus was summarily dissolved," says Southey, "this unfortunate marriage. Mrs. Wesley lived ten years after this separation, and her epitaph describes her as a woman of exemplary piety, a tender mother, and a devoted friend : but it prudently says nothing about her virtues as a wife."

"During twenty years," says Stevens, "she persecuted him with unfounded suspicions and intolerable annoyances, and it is among the most admirable proofs of the genuine greatness of his character that his public career never wavered, never lost one jot of its energy or success, during this protracted domestic wretchedness."

In the autumn of 1753, as a consequence of his excessive labours, Wesley had a dangerous illness : his physicians feared consumption, and ordered an entire cessation of his labours and retirement into the country. The Societies became alarmed at the news, and offered public prayers for his restoration. Everything seemed to point to a fatal consummation, and Wesley himself expected it, as is proved by the following epitaph which, "to prevent vile pane-

\* "I did not desert her : I did not send her away : I will not recall her."

gyric," he composed himself:—"Here lieth the body of John Wesley, a brand plucked out of the burning: who died of a consumption in the fifty-first year of his age, not leaving, after his debts are paid, ten pounds behind him; praying, God be merciful to me an unprofitable servant." [He ordered that this, if any, inscription should be placed on his tombstone.]"

This illness called forth many testimonies of sympathy from all quarters, and showed the real sentiments entertained toward him by those who differed from him in their religious views. None of these testimonies were more precious than that of Whitefield. The letter written by the former fellow-labourer of Wesley does too much honour to both to be withheld. It proves also, what we have shown already, that every touch of bitterness had disappeared from the intercourse of these two servants of God, and that both were living in that lofty region where the evils of this world are as if they were not, because God is all in all.

*"Bristol, December 3d, 1753.*

"REV. AND VERY DEAR SIR,—

"If seeing you so weak when leaving London distressed me, the news and prospect of your approaching dissolution hath quite weighed me down. I pity myself and the Church, but not you. A radiant throne awaits you, and ere long you will enter into your Master's joy. Yonder He stands with a massy crown, ready to put it on your head, amidst an admiring throng of saints and angels. But I, poor I, that have been waiting for my dissolution these nineteen years, must be left behind to grovel here below! Well! this is my comfort; it cannot be long ere the chariots will be sent even for worthless me. If prayers can detain them, even you, Rev. and Dear Sir, shall not leave us yet; but if the decree is gone forth, that you must now fall

asleep in Jesus, may He kiss your soul away, and give you to die in the embraces of triumphant love ! If in the land of the dying, I hope to pay my last respects to you next week. If not, Rev. and very Dear Sir, Farewell. *Ego sequar, etsi non passibus æquis.\** My heart is too big, tears trickle down too fast, and you are, I fear, too weak, for me to enlarge. Underneath you may there be Christ's everlasting arms ! I commend you to His never-failing mercy, and am,

"Rev. and very Dear Sir,

"Your most affectionate, sympathizing, and afflicted younger brother in the Gospel of our common Lord,

"G. WHITEFIELD."

Whitefield's fears were not realized, and Wesley was restored to health. For nearly forty years he was yet to be engaged in the service of God and of the Churches. His recovery was slow. The leisure thus afforded he made use of in preparing several works for the press. He finished the revision of various works destined to form part of the "Christian Family Library," a series of volumes in which he had abridged the works of many eminent authors for the use of his Societies. From Lewisham he removed to the Hot-Wells, near Bristol, and there commenced his "Notes on the New Testament," a work which notwithstanding its conciseness of expression, abounds in valuable thought.

On the return of spring, Wesley resumed his ordinary labours with renewed vigour.

\* "I shall follow, though not with equal steps."



## CHAPTER IV.

*INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PROSPERITY: AMERICA.*

1760—1770.

WESLEY was almost a sexagenarian at the commencement of the decade upon which we are now entering: his activity, however, suffered no abatement. Though in years he was bordering on old age, in the ardour with which he prosecuted his work he was as young as ever. That work had two important features, evangelization and organization. A sketch of the latter, as gradually developed in his Societies, we shall reserve for a separate chapter. In this we shall continue to follow the course of Wesley's evangelistic labours. The success that had attended his long itinerancy was too marked for him to dream of relinquishing that mode of action: to have settled down into a sedentary life would not only have ill accorded with his own tastes but also have proved a death-blow to his Societies. At that period of their existence they more than ever needed the vital bond which his strong authority established and maintained among them. Had they been deprived of this at so early a stage of their history, they would, in all probability, have been reduced to total dissolution, through the influence of sectarian strife, and their providential mission have been frustrated.

Wesley's energies were still devoted to incessant journeyings: his parish comprised the three kingdoms, and ever widening, fell little short of realizing his own ideal, expressed in the memorable words, "The world is my parish."

In 1760, and several succeeding years, he had the happiness of witnessing a remarkable revival, which spread throughout his Societies. Wesley had from the beginning both received himself, and preached to others, the doctrine

of Christian perfection : he believed and taught that it is possible for a Christian in this life to obtain a complete deliverance from sin. Even at Oxford, he had discovered among his favourite authors this precious gem, though its brilliance was clouded by the thick smoke of mystical imaginations. He had gradually restored it to its pristine purity, and to its place in the cabinet of Scripture truth. According to his view, deliverance from sin, like all other blessings of the New Covenant, was the fruit of the redeeming work of the Cross, but, like them, it was to be attained only by the wrestling faith of the individual Christian.

This inspiriting doctrine, though held by Wesley from the beginning, was not of a nature to be immediately grasped, in all its comprehensiveness, by his people. It was necessary that his preaching should be mainly directed to the fundamental articles of the faith, providing first milk for babes and then strong meat for those of riper years. But when once the Societies were well grounded in the rudiments of our holy religion, it needed that they should be built up, and Wesley believed that this doctrine was "the grand depositum that God had committed to the Methodists, and that their special mission was to spread Scriptural holiness through the land."

The great revival which made its appearance in the year 1760, indicated that this mission was being taken up in good earnest. For a long time a considerable spiritual quickening was observable throughout the Societies. "Here began," says Wesley, "that glorious work of sanctification which had been nearly at a stand for twenty years. But from time to time it spread, first through various parts of Yorkshire, afterwards in London, then through most parts of England ; next through Dublin, Limerick, and all the south and west of Ireland. And wherever the work of sanctification increased, the whole work of God increased in all its branches."

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Wesley's journals of this period are full of details respecting the progress of this remarkable work. Wherever he goes, he finds that the Societies are strengthened and increased under the vivifying breath of the Spirit of God, and while their internal life is thus developed, their external activity is more abundantly rewarded with success. In March, 1761, he called many of his preachers together at Leeds, in order to concert measures for the further promotion of this great movement : he saw plainly that in their preaching they ought to aim more than ever at encouraging and directing the people in their aspirations after holiness. From these brethren he learned that the revival was extending over all Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. A flame was kindled also at Manchester which he trusted "neither men nor devils would ever be able to quench." "Many persons in London," he says, "have experienced so deep and universal a change as it had not entered into their hearts to conceive." At Bristol, the Society was larger than it had been for many years. "God was pleased to pour out His Spirit this year," he writes, "on every part both of England and Ireland ; perhaps in a manner we had never seen before ; certainly not for twenty years."

"Our day of Pentecost," he writes again in 1762, "is fully come." In London alone there were four hundred witnesses of deliverance from all sin. At Liverpool, the Society was wonderfully quickened ; and Wesley found a remarkable maturity in their piety. "What do you want now ?" said he to a girl of twelve years. "Nothing in this world," said she with amazing energy, "nothing but more of my Jesus."

The revival that broke out in Dublin, Wesley deemed the most remarkable of all. The main instrument of it was John Manners, "a plain man, of middling sense, and not eloquent, but rather rude in speech ; one who had never before been remarkably useful, but seemed to be raised up

for this single work. And as soon as it was done, he fell into a consumption, languished a while, and died." In one of his letters he writes to Wesley, "The people are all on fire. Such a day as last Sunday I never saw. While I was at prayer in the Society, the power of the Lord overshadowed us, and some cried out, 'Lord, I can believe!'" On visiting Dublin, Wesley found the truth had not been at all exceeded. "In some respects," he says, "the work of God in this place was more remarkable than even that in London. 1. It is far greater in proportion to the time, and to the number of the people....2. The work was more pure. In all this time, while they were mildly and tenderly treated, there were none of them headstrong or unadvisable; none that were wiser than their teachers; none who dreamed of being immortal or infallible, or incapable of temptation; in short, no whimsical or enthusiastic persons: all were calm and sober-minded." This eulogium on the work at Dublin involves a censure on that in London. We shall see presently that there was room for this.

At Limerick, Edinderry, and other places in Ireland, a similar work was being carried on in many hearts, and the presence of Wesley was as a spark to set them in a flame.

At the close of 1763, Wesley wrote, "Here I stood, and looked back on the late occurrences. Before Thomas Walsh left England, God began that great work which has continued ever since without any considerable intermission. During the whole time, many have been convinced of sin, many justified, and many backsliders healed. But the peculiar work of this season has been what St. Paul calls 'the perfecting of the saints.' Many persons in London, in Bristol, in York, and in various parts both of England and Ireland, have experienced so deep and universal a change as it had not before entered into their hearts to conceive. After a deep conviction of inbred sin, of their total fall from God, they have been so filled with faith and

love, (and generally in a moment,) that sin vanished, and they found from that time no pride, anger, desire, or unbelief. They could rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks. Now, whether we call this the destruction or suspension of sin, it is a glorious work of God : such a work as, considering both the depth and extent of it, we never saw in these kingdoms before."

Wesley had, as we have said, good reason to complain of the mischief that had been done by certain enthusiasts in London. Among the local preachers was a military man, named George Bell, whose flighty imagination was so captivated by the doctrine of deliverance from sin as to betray him into dangerous errors. He pretended to be infallible, declared that he was free from temptation, and, fully possessed with the idea of his own superior spirituality, entirely revolted against the authority of a Christian of less lofty pretensions. He believed himself endowed with the gift of miracles, and accordingly attempted to heal a blind man. The failure that followed this exercise of his gift did not by any means undeceive either himself or the simple souls that gave credence to his professions. The fanaticism spread, and Wesley was grieved to see Thomas Maxfield, the oldest of his preachers, rallying round its standard.

The party thus formed taught that a person who is merely justified is not born of God, but that when once sanctified, he need no longer watch and pray ; his sole duty is to believe, and, further, that he can neither sin nor fall from grace. These errors spread with alarming rapidity, and, after trying in vain the effect of forbearance and persuasion, Wesley was compelled to exclude George Bell from the Society. A mad prophecy of Bell's, to the effect that the world would come to an end on the 28th of February, 1763, obtained such currency, that, for the sake of his

own reputation, and that of his Societies, Wesley was obliged to disown all partnership in it through the medium of the public journals.

The partisans of George Bell were too far advanced in their views to be at all disconcerted by the non-fulfilment of the prophecy ; they discovered all sorts of reasons, satisfactory to their own minds, for the delay of the grand catastrophe which they had so anxiously awaited. The exclusion of their leader from the Societies was the signal for their retirement ; and about one hundred and seventy resigned their connection with Wesley. To those who endeavoured to dissuade them, they replied, "Blind John is not capable of teaching us ; we will keep to Mr. Maxfield." The latter also, in spite of all the efforts of his old friend to retain him, completely broke with him, and became the recognized pastor of the disaffected ones.

It was manifest that, but for the exercise of discipline, the innovators would have destroyed the Societies. If, instead of leaving them to take the initiative, Wesley had from the first used his authority, he would perhaps thereby have avoided even the appearance of complicity in their excesses, as well as the danger of furnishing an argument to those who held that the doctrine of entire sanctification necessarily involved these dangerous consequences. But he hoped that mildness would avail more than severity. One of his members said to him one day, "Sir, I employ several men. Now, if one of my servants will not follow my direction, is it not right for me to discard him at once ? Pray, do you apply this to Mr. Bell." His answer shows the nature of his scruples : "It is right to discard such a servant ; but what would you do if he were your son ?"

When the division took place, he felt it deeply. Maxfield having refused to preach in his turn at the Foundery, Wesley took his place and preached from the words, "If I

be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved." And he adds in his journal, "So the breach is made ; but I am clear, I have done all I possibly could to prevent it."

Such eccentricities are not uncommon concomitants of a religious revival. They did not, however, in this instance paralyze the glorious work of which they were the parody. "We have lost," says Wesley, "the dross ; the pure gold remains : that is to say, faith which worketh by love ; and we have good reason to believe that it increases every day."

Apart from these agitations, the work was generally in a prosperous condition, as Wesley found in the course of his journeys. He observed that the Revival slackened not in its onward march at any single point : not only was the work increasing on the old stations, but new ones were continually opening up. Wherever he went he met with the warmest reception, and his visits stimulated the zeal of the Societies already formed, and encouraged them to prosecute new enterprises. In many places his five o'clock services were so numerous attended that no place was large enough to hold the people ; and he was obliged to preach in the open air. At Birstal, the hill-side was crowded with a congregation of twenty thousand. At Leeds, his audiences were equally numerous, and a profound sensation was produced. At Newcastle, although the interest of novelty no longer existed, he preached in the public places to multitudes exceeding all he had ever seen ; so much so, that his voice could not reach them all.

Cornwall always furnished immense and deeply attentive audiences, and there he was perhaps more at home than anywhere else. The natural amphitheatre at Gwennap was his favourite preaching-place in this county. In it he could address with ease multitudes who could not have heard him on level ground. There, on a peaceful summer's eve, while the setting sun cast its slanting rays

upon the scene, he would lift his clear and resonant voice, and then many thousands of human voices responded to his own, chanting one of his own or his brother's hymns to one of those sweet and simple melodies which England possesses in such abundance. At St. Ives, a lofty rock served for his pulpit, while the audience were ranged on a level sward that stretched far away to the sea. Wesley was by no means insensible to the advantages possessed by such spots as these : he knew how impressible the people were, and how eloquent to simple souls was the voice of nature.

In Ireland, great success still attended the preaching. At Cork, the people seemed to strive to efface the remembrance of the trials to which he had been subjected there : the clergy and gentry crowded to hear him preach. At Dublin and Limerick, the congregations were larger than ever. At Kilfinnan he preached in the market-place, where nearly the whole of the population assembled, and he was afterwards accompanied to his lodgings by some of the congregation, to whom he addressed a second exhortation, and who would not leave him till the night was far advanced. The next morning, before five o'clock, the crowd assembled again in the same spirit as before : tears flowed, sobs were heard in every part ; some mourning under a sense of sin, others rejoicing to hear the good news of salvation.

Wesley continued to visit Scotland also, and his preaching always aroused a deep interest among this grave and staid people, though it did not produce the same visible effects as in other parts of Great Britain.

Popular tumults now became more and more rare, and, when they did occur, they were by no means of so serious a character as formerly. There were no more of those scenes of confusion in which the life of the Missionary was at the mercy of a drunken and disorderly mob.



Opposition had very generally sunk to the level of low buffoonery.

At Norwich, an attempt was made to interrupt the meeting by showers of stones thrown at the doors of the chapel ; but the patience of the Methodists outlasted that of their adversaries, and they decided to beat a retreat. At Barrow, Wesley was hooted by a mob ; but "their hearts failed," and they let him pass unmolested. At Bradford, a curious incident defeated the designs of the assailants. Their leader, a man who prided himself on his respectability, had filled his pockets with rotten eggs, and towards the end of the preaching raised a cry as a signal for his accomplices to begin the assault. But, while he was preparing to make use of his missiles, a young man came, and, clapping his hands on his pockets, broke all the eggs at once. The laugh was turned against him, and the contemplated assault failed.

As he grew older, Wesley lost nothing of that authority of speech and demeanour which had contributed so much to the victories that attended his encounters with the mob. His whitening locks served to add to the authority he had gained by force of character. His utterance and his gestures produced almost magical effects upon the people. When he spoke, it was to command, and his commands were generally obeyed. At Kilkenny, on one occasion, a crowd of Catholics broke in upon one of his congregations with intent to disperse it. He simply fixed upon them a steady gaze, and then said, in a tone of determination, "Be silent ; or begone !" And silence was restored as if by the wand of an enchanter.

The authorities now also understood their duty better, and no longer became promoters of disorder. Almost everywhere, their firmness sufficed to repress tumult. At Stallbridge, however, it needed all Wesley's influence to constrain the magistrates to do their duty. For a long time the people

had committed great excesses, breaking the doors and windows of the houses where the Methodists lived, plundering their goods and attacking their persons, so that they could not walk in the street without being exposed to the worst indignities. In vain did they appeal to the magistrates: they were always deaf to their complaints. In despair of obtaining justice, they wrote to Wesley, who brought their case before the Court of King's Bench, where, after great expense and long delay, he gained the day. This encouraged his friends, and proved to his adversaries that there was "law, even for Methodists."

The clergy retained their intolerance and ill-will longer than the magistracy. Many still denounced Wesley from their pulpits, and repulsed the Methodists from the Lord's table, where the careless and worldly were admitted without question; and some went to still further lengths. In 1765, Wesley was conducting an open-air service in a Devonshire village, when he saw the clergyman approaching in company with some of the neighbouring gentry. He began his sermon as follows:—"There may be some truths which concern some men only; but this concerns all mankind." The clergyman interrupted by crying out, "That is false doctrine; that is predestination;" thus proving that he had not understood the first sentence. Immediately, those who accompanied him began to talk and laugh in a noisy manner, and a huntsman, who belonged to the party, set on his dogs, that their barking might drown the preacher's voice. Another began to address him in grossly insulting terms, amid the applause of the clergyman and his company, who doubtless deemed all weapons lawful when employed against the "enemies" of the Church. Before such assailants, who if they did not respect his ministerial gown should at least have revered his grey hairs, Wesley retired, "There being no probability," he says, "of a quiet hearing."

His journals, by their simple recital of facts, formed a serious though unintentional indictment against the fallen clergy of the eighteenth century. He never forgets, however, to draw the moral, and to seek the profit of his readers. At Enniscorthy, he writes, "The mob, encouraged by their superiors, beat and abused whom they pleased, broke open their houses, and did just what they listed. A wretched clergyman confirmed them therein, and applied to the Methodist preachers 2 Tim. iii. 6, 7.... After he had painted them as black as devils, he added, 'I have not time to finish now; next Sunday I will give you the rest.' But the next morning he was struck in a strange manner. He could not bear to be a moment alone. He cried out, 'Those hobgoblins; do not you see them? There, there! The room is full of them!' Having continued thus some days, he screamed out, 'See that hobgoblin at the bed's feet! O that roll, that roll which he holds up to me! All my sins are written therein!' Not long after, without showing the least sign of hope, he went to his account."

While such blind and often dishonourable opposition was maintained against Wesley among the lower clergy, better treatment was generally accorded to him by the dignitaries of the Church. It was not always so, however; and more than once, the example of violence and injustice was set by those who occupied the highest stations. About 1750, Lavington, Bishop of Exeter, attacked the movement in a pamphlet entitled, "The Enthusiasm of the Methodists and Papists Compared." In this angry document he represents Wesley's work as a covert return to Roman Catholicism, and accuses him of being a secret agent of the Jesuits. These accusations were grounded on false facts, which Wesley himself easily contradicted and disproved.

Ten years later, Warburton, another bishop, entered the lists against Wesley, who, according to his view, "occupied a

a foremost place among "modern fanatics." Though this antagonist displayed more liberality than his predecessor, he proved himself equally incapable of understanding the religious movement that was taking place. Viewing it from the stand-point of an icy deism, he could not but condemn the birth-throes of souls that longed for peace and life. Wesley's answer is remarkable, both for its depth and for its form: he claims, as the basis of the work in which he is engaged, the mighty operation of the Spirit of God, whose influence he found it easy to trace in events that were taking place every day.

Another attack, which perhaps did greater injury to the work of Methodism, was the posthumous publication of the "Eleven Letters" of Hervey, author of the "Meditations." Having been early associated with Wesley and Whitefield when they were at Oxford, he had embraced the Calvinistic tenets of the latter, and taken an active part in controversy on that subject. Under the influence of a momentary irritation he wrote eleven virulent letters against Wesley, which he kept in manuscript: on his death-bed, he expressed regret for having written them, and requested that they might be committed to the flames. His executors, thinking of nothing but the profit that might accrue from a posthumous work of Hervey's, did not comply with this injunction, but employed a man named Cudworth to revise the manuscripts and prepare them for the press. This man was a violent opponent of Wesley, and, blinded by prejudice, he thought fit to interpolate sentences containing the most unjust accusations, palming them off upon the public as a genuine part of the work. This publication could not but inflict considerable injury on Wesley's cause; and in Scotland, particularly, his enemies made use of it to his disadvantage.

The spirit of intolerance which raged against Methodism among the clergy resulted, in 1767, in the expulsion of six

students from Oxford, "for holding Methodist tenets, and for praying, reading the Scriptures and singing hymns in private houses."

The co-operation and friendship of such a clergyman as Fletcher afforded abundant consolation to Wesley's mind under the malice and abuse of the dignitaries of the Church. Fletcher was now settled at Madeley, a poor, degraded parish in Shropshire, where he exercised a truly apostolic ministry, such as filled the minds of his contemporaries with admiration. "Sir, he was a luminary!" said Venn to a brother clergyman. "A luminary, did I say? He was a *sun*! I have known all the great men for these fifty years, but I have known none like him." The poet Southey said of him, "No century, no country has produced a man of more fervent piety or more perfect charity: no church ever possessed a more apostolic ministry." Thoroughly one with Wesley both in spirit and principles, Fletcher frequently accompanied him on his missionary journeys, and in his own parish employed the various modes of action peculiar to Methodism. His eloquent tongue and almost inspired pen were alike at the service of a cause he had so much at heart. We shall see presently how by his writings he fought side by side with his friend.

The close of the period we are now contemplating was marked by an event of great importance, viz., the introduction of Methodism into America. The workings of Providence are especially noticeable in the foundation of a Church which had so great a future before it. A few Irish emigrants, who had received the Gospel through the instrumentality of Methodism, landed at New York in 1760: a second detachment arrived a little later. Deprived of all religious privileges, they soon lapsed into indifference. Happily, however, among these families there was one woman, Barbara Heck, in whom the hallowed fire burned

with an ardour not to be damped by worldly influences. One day, when several of the emigrants were playing at cards, she came abruptly into the room, and, filled with holy indignation, seized the pack of cards and threw it into the fire, at the same time adding some serious admonitions. She then appealed to Philip Embury, who had been a local preacher in his native country, and earnestly exhorted him to conquer his natural timidity, and begin to hold meetings at his house. This bold stroke took immediate effect. Embury held the first meeting in his own house : it consisted of five persons. He also formed a class. Gradually this little band of Christians multiplied : religious convictions spread on all sides, and it became necessary to open a place of worship. Soon after, an English local preacher, called Captain Webb, who had been sent to America on military duty, encouraged the newly-organized Society by his presence and help. The powerful sermons of this preacher in uniform created a sensation in the country, and were the means of bringing about a great revival. All the places in which meetings were held became too small, and a chapel was built and dedicated to the service of God in 1768. Step by step, Methodism extended over various parts of Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Maryland, and Virginia, everywhere following the openings of Providence and gathering strength.

By this time the various American congregations felt the want of a closer connection with the parent Society at home. A pressing appeal was accordingly addressed to Wesley, and at the Conference of 1769, the question was asked, "Who is willing to go?" Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmoor offered themselves. To defray the expenses of the voyage, a collection was made among the preachers ; and these men, who were often themselves in want of the necessaries of life, contributed in addition fifty pounds towards the establishment of this first Methodist mission. On their

arrival at New York, the two missionaries found an organized Society, consisting of a hundred members, and a chapel capable of accommodating seven hundred persons, which was already so inadequate to the wants of the people, that many of the meetings were held in the open air. "There appears," says one of the newly-arrived preachers, "such a willingness to hear the Word of God in America as I never saw before."

Such was the beginning of the work which was to expand to such marvellous dimensions. In many respects it was a timely movement. Whitefield, whose energies had been divided between the Old World and the New, and who had done much to revive the Independent Churches in America, died in America in the very year in which Wesley's preachers commenced their mission. Incomparable as were his oratorical talents and evangelical zeal, he was wholly destitute of the organizing faculty, and could not weld into a solid system the elements that had been fused under his powerful preaching. The strong and wise administration of Wesley was to remedy this defect, and to gather into the bonds of a well-organized community a multitude of souls won from indifference and worldly-mindedness.

The news of Whitefield's death filled the mind of his great fellow-labourer with profound grief. He was deeply touched when he learned that one of his friend's last requests was that he should preach his funeral sermon. This request he complied with, and in the Tabernacle reared by Whitefield he pronounced a fitting eulogium on the virtues of the departed. Their early intimacy had long since been restored, and had been deepened by the experience of blessings and trials in which both had long shared.

## CHAPTER V.

*ORGANIZATION AND DISCIPLINE.*

MORE than thirty years had now passed since the commencement of the Methodist Revival in England, and fully five and twenty since the first Conference, which had established its unity and laid the foundations of its ecclesiastical system. In the interval, that system had been moulded, slowly and without any serious check, by those Providential indications which Wesley was so careful to follow; and, year by year, it had been the business of the Conference to note such indications, and thus to build up the Societies under their care into a regular organization. The successive additions thus made to the framework of Methodism we shall now briefly describe.

In Wesley's view, as well as in that of his fellow-labourers, the Revival which they had been so largely instrumental in bringing about was rather a return to the doctrines and practice of the Church than an ecclesiastical reform. Questions of organization with them were only of secondary importance, and were valued mainly as they bore upon the salvation of souls and the progress of the Christian life. It was this idea that ruled the early Conferences. Composed of Wesley's preachers, together with those of the clergy who were favourable to the movement, besides a few friends of Whitefield's, and, at times, a few laymen, these first Conferences were occupied in defining the doctrines they taught: justification, sanctification, and the witness of the Spirit formed the subjects of interesting discussions, the results of which are embodied in the "Minutes" subsequently published. Wesley's views on certain doctrines differed from those of some of his contemporaries, and hence



arose the necessity for the luminous exposition which they thus received at his hands. This is not the place to enlarge upon the clear and compact theology here presented to us ; suffice it to say that, throughout this second stage in the existence of early Methodism, his opinions underwent no change, save that they became clearer and stronger as years rolled by.

On the other hand, his views in reference to the organization of his Societies and their connection with the Established Church, were greatly modified by the course of events. We have already seen that Wesley commenced his labours in the hope that a cordial understanding might soon be arrived at between the clergy and himself. Everything tended to increase his desire for such a union—his family traditions, the cast of his mind, his natural sympathies, and even his interest in the work itself ; and bitter experience alone disabused him of his generous illusions. It is interesting to trace this gradual revolution in Wesley's ecclesiastical views.

In his first Conference, composed in part of clergymen, he boldly defends the rights of Christian liberty against the extravagant pretensions of the Episcopate. At the second Conference, held in 1745, to the question "Is not the will of our governors a law?" he replies categorically, "No ; not of any governor, temporal or spiritual. Therefore, if any bishop wills that I should not preach the Gospel, his will is no law to me....I am to obey God rather than man."

The right of independent action, thus clearly enounced, Wesley had already exercised for many years : to him it was a practical necessity before it became an ecclesiastical theory. This liberality was, however, connected with certain prejudices which sprang from his early education : he still believed in the dogma of apostolical succession, and he strongly defended the Anglican Episcopalianism. Still his

opinions wavered even now on all these points. Lord King's work on the Primitive Church appears to have contributed largely to the progress of his views. "In spite of the vehement prejudice of my education," he says in 1746, "I was ready to believe that this was a fair and impartial draught ; but if so, it would follow that Bishops and Presbyters are (essentially) of one order ; and that originally every Christian congregation was a Church independent on all others."

The principles here somewhat doubtfully affirmed, were adopted unhesitatingly at the Conference of 1747. Wesley then declared that a national Church is "a merely political institution," and in reply to the question, "In what age was the Divine right of Episcopacy first asserted in England?" he replies, "About the middle of Queen Elizabeth's reign. Till then, all the bishops and clergy in England continually allowed and joined in the ministrations of those who were not episcopally ordained." He also held that the Church might modify its organization as time and circumstances required, without being under any obligation to find a pattern in the Church of the apostolic age. Nevertheless, he still strove to combine with these principles a proper respect to episcopal authority. So strong was his desire to maintain such a harmony, that he even made certain concessions which might have proved greatly detrimental to the success of the work which God had committed to him. Hence, this same year he endeavoured to fix some limit to the development of the lay ministry, that it might give less umbrage to the clergy ; and, still out of regard to their susceptibilities, recommended to his assistants to preach without forming any new Societies. These perilous concessions, however, were far from satisfying his opponents, and at the same time threatened the dissolution of the work : they were, therefore, soon abandoned. Besides, the clergy themselves, by their blind

opposition, seemed determined to remove Wesley's last scruples, and to destroy all the prestige of that authority which he had been wont to revere.

The Societies themselves now began to be conscious of their strength, and made strong remonstrances on the subject : so early as 1751, loud complaints were uttered. A grave question was thus raised, and one which created enormous embarrassment until the time came—and it was long before it did come—for its final solution.

In the meantime, while the Societies had their religious wants supplied by the ministrations of the lay preachers, for the Sacraments they were obliged to go to the Anglican clergy. These were not only generally opposed to Methodism, but were frequently men of no piety and of doubtful morality : it is no wonder, therefore, that pious persons scrupled to receive the sacred elements from the hand that was raised to encourage the mob. It not seldom happened that they were repelled from the Lord's table, where scandalous sinners were received without question. Both the Wesleys, as we have seen, had endured such treatment themselves.

Troubled thus, both by their own consciences and by the annoyances to which they were exposed, the Societies soon demanded the administration of the Sacraments by their own preachers ; but for a long time their request was not complied with. In 1754, several of the preachers, such as Thomas Walsh, and Edward and Charles Perronet, yielded to the solicitations of their flocks, and took upon them to administer the Lord's Supper. This circumstance was widely reported, and occasioned considerable controversy among the Societies. The Conference of 1755, at which no less than sixty-three preachers were present, found it necessary to take some decisive action. The question was stated in all its breadth : it was, whether they ought to separate from the Established Church ; for all felt that this

was the real bearing of what had taken place. After a dispassionate and thorough debate, continued for several days, it was agreed by the Conference that, "whether it was lawful or not, it was no ways *expedient*." Walsh and his friends consented for peace' sake to refrain from administering the Sacraments. Wesley admired their spirit, but acknowledged that he "could not answer their arguments." In a letter to his brother Charles, who was hostile to these innovations, Wesley wrote, "If, as my lady says, all outward Establishments are Babel, so is this Establishment. Let it stand, for me ; I neither set it up nor pull it down. But let you and me build up the city of God."

In 1758, Wesley published his "Reasons against a Separation from the Church of England," a pamphlet remarkable for its moderation and good sense. In it he justifies his attachment to the Established Church, an attachment as disinterested as it was ill-requited. So he found it to be in 1764, when, renewing his previous efforts, he addressed a circular letter to "fifty or sixty" Evangelical clergymen, to invite them, not to make concessions on any doctrinal point, but simply to endeavour after a more active co-operation in the work of reviving practical piety. This manifesto was treated with silent neglect: three clergymen alone were at the pains to answer it. About twelve, however, met him at his next Conference ; but they proposed a plan by which the Establishment would have entirely absorbed Methodism, and, under the pretence of embracing, crushed out its very life.

Wesley was grieved to see that, in these debates, his brother made common cause with those who counselled the sacrifice of the organization by means of which Methodism had achieved its success. He now fully understood that he must no longer encourage the hope of any assistance from the regular clergy, and decided to pursue the work of his life without seeking their co-operation.

The question of the administration of the Sacraments was still undecided, but it was necessary that in some way the wishes of the Societies should be met. Besides the direct assistance of a few of the clergy, Wesley had obtained episcopal ordination for some of his fellow-labourers. The Bishop of Londonderry, who encouraged Wesley's labours in Ireland, had laid hands on Thomas Maxfield, saying as he did so, "Sir, I ordain you to assist that holy man, that he may not kill himself with excessive labour." By Maxfield's defection, narrated above, Wesley lost this assistance. In 1763, a prelate of the Greek Church, Bishop Erasmus, visited England, and was so much interested in the Methodist movement that he consented to ordain one of Wesley's preachers. This matter created a great commotion : it became evident that, if Wesley still believed in episcopal ordination, he regarded the exclusive pretensions of the Anglican Church as worthless.

The apparent indecision of Wesley's mind in reference to the Establishment has been severely criticized : he has been reproached with hesitation in regard to giving his people a distinct ecclesiastical status : on the other hand, he has been accused of having placed them in a false position through excessive reverence for the Anglican Church. It is certain that, to an advanced period of his life, Wesley could not bear the idea of breaking with the Church to which he was attached by so many ties : that Church might abuse and disown him, but he retained for her the deepest affection ; and, even in his last days, he manifests returns of sympathy and tenderness that surprise us. But in this we see proofs of a delicacy of sentiment which sheds a vivid light upon his character. He was one of those men who entertain a deep reverence for what is old. In the presence of a decrepit Church he displays the sublime modesty of a child, who respects the majesty of a father even though he be so degraded as

to be unworthy of the name. He might perhaps have better served his own interests and those of his Connexion, had he from the first raised the flag of independence: he would thereby have gained a definite position, and spared himself much strife: he would have achieved greater renown as the leader of a party; but it is doubtful whether he would have been more useful. We should have recognized in him a more marked individuality; but we should not have had to contemplate a character so exquisitely pure.

No longer reckoning on union with the Anglican Church, Wesley devoted his energies to the task of consolidating the bonds which united the Societies to their preachers, and united the preachers among themselves. Though the great question of the Sacraments was not yet solved, a solution was easy to be foreseen from the very existence of the unordained clergy. Their rights might be withheld for a season through excessive deference to established order, but were sure to be attained sooner or later by the mere force of circumstances. During the period we have now been reviewing, this body acquired such a compactness and unity that it could well afford patiently to await the future.

We have seen how, at his first Conference, Wesley declared that he only employed lay preachers "in cases of necessity," and how for a long time he continued to regard their vocation as merely provisional and temporary. The course of events led him to form a different judgment, and he now laboured with all his might to impress upon this institution a permanent and definite character. At the third Conference the following grave question was proposed:—"How shall we try those who believe they are moved by the Holy Ghost, and called of God to preach?" The answer is, "Inquire, 1. Do they know in whom they have believed? Have they the love of God in their hearts Do

they desire and seek nothing but God? And are they holy in all manner of conversation? 2. Have they gifts (as well as grace) for the work? Have they (in some tolerable degree) a clear, sound understanding? Have they a right judgment in the things of God? Have they a just conception of salvation by faith? And has God given them any degree of utterance? Do they speak justly, readily, clearly? 3. Have they success? .. Have any received remission of sins by their preaching?"

These inquiries were the first of a series of examinations which Wesley instituted into the qualifications of such as desired to enter the ranks of the itinerant ministry. These were only received by the Conference after having been subjected to a searching ordeal, accompanied by solemn fasting and prayer. The year that followed their entrance upon the work was considered as one of probation, and the following Conference came to a definite conclusion respecting them. The final admission took place without ceremony: the candidate was set apart for the work by the prayers of his brethren. In this respect, however, Wesley reserved his right of action, and declared that he only postponed for the present a more formal mode of consecration. "We would not make haste," said he, "we desire barely to follow Providence, as it gradually opens."

Though Wesley regarded the religious life of his fellow-labourers as the primary qualification, he by no means overlooked their intellectual development. From the first he drew up for them a course of study and of regular reading. He never ceased to stimulate them to diligence, urging them to rise at four o'clock in the morning, as he did himself, that they might find time to prosecute their studies as well as their missionary labours. "Read the most useful books," he said in 1766, "and that regularly and constantly. Steadily spend all the morning in this employ, or at least five hours in twenty-four....' But I have

no taste for reading.' Contract a taste for it by use, or return to your trade."

In order to keep his preachers in health, and to prevent their wearing themselves out by constant preaching in the same places, Wesley required them to change their Circuits frequently. The Conference of 1767 systematized these changes, and rendered them obligatory. It was agreed, "that the same preacher shall not be sent, ordinarily above one, never above two years together." At a later period, the term was extended to three years.

The preachers were genuine models of self-denial. If they did not take the vow of poverty on entering the itinerant ministry, they practised a voluntary course of self-renunciation that was never excelled by the followers of St. Francis. One of the rules was, "Take no money of any one. If they give you food when you are hungry, or clothes when you need them, it is good; but not silver or gold. Let there be no pretence to say we grow rich by the Gospel." Receiving their daily supplies from the Society, the first preachers were only paid in money enough to defray their travelling expenses, and these were sufficiently modest, the greater part performing their journeys on foot. One of them, John Jane, in that way travelled from Bristol to Holyhead, in order to join Wesley, having only three shillings in his pocket when he reached him; and even this small sum exceeded the actual expenses of the journey, owing to the hospitality he everywhere met with on his way. On his death, his property was sold to meet his funeral expenses, and the proceeds of the sale were insufficient for the purpose, not amounting to forty shillings altogether. "All the money he had was one shilling and fourpence." Wesley, who states these facts, adds, "Enough for any unmarried preacher of the Gospel to leave to his executors."

All the preachers were not disposed, however, like the



brother in question, to remain single all their days ; and those who married suffered great privations. Many were even compelled to retire from the active work of the ministry, that they might find means to support their families. The Conference of 1752 saw the necessity of remedying this state of things, and recommended that the Societies should, for the future, pay each preacher the annual sum of twelve pounds. This recommendation remained a dead letter in many instances ; and thirteen years later, in 1765, the York Society actually sent a deputation to the Conference to request that they might be exempted from the necessity of paying their preacher this "large" sum.

With Societies so small, and in certain cases so wanting in liberality, the preachers would many of them have been in danger of starving to death, if they had not carried on some secular business in conjunction with their evangelical labours : several of them were compelled to labour with their hands in the daytime, while they devoted the evening to their ministerial work. Such a division of their energies was no degradation, sanctioned as it has been by the authority of St. Paul ; but it was necessarily detrimental to their ministry, inasmuch as they could only devote to it a limited portion of their time and strength. The Conference of 1768 took cognizance of this fact, and agreed that, for the future, itinerant preachers should be entirely set apart to their holy work, and depend wholly for their support on God and His Church.

The year following it was resolved that preachers' wives should receive aid from the Societies, and that a kind of assessment should be made for this purpose : shortly after, there were forty-three wives in receipt of this assistance. A similar resolution was passed in reference to the children of preachers, who found in the schools established by Wesley at Kingswood a well-ordered institution, where they received a Christian education, the cost of

which was borne in part by the Societies. Thus Wesley endeavoured to relieve his fellow-labourers of the worldly cares which could not but militate against their efficiency.

The usefulness of these humble servants of God had vastly increased during the period we have been narrating, and it was to them Methodism owed its surprising extension. It is not our province to sketch, however briefly, their remarkable labours. Suffice it to state that such men as Nelson, Walsh, Hopper, Haime, Staniforth, Taylor, and Wright, rendered incalculable service to the work of the Revival. They had received an ordination which amply compensated for the want of that formal ordination which had been refused them by the bishops : the approbation of God manifestly resting upon their labours was the best seal to their ministry, and the best answer to the contempt of the world.

If Wesley recognized the hand of Providence in the establishment of this popular pastorate, its rapid enlargement and success continually strengthened that conviction. He endeavoured to give this institution a firm and solid basis. While he strove to raise its intellectual standard and to inspire it with the true spirit of its mission, he also considered how he might best perpetuate its existence. The great preacher had arrived at old age, and might at any time be taken to his reward. Till his death, he must of necessity continue to be the living centre and effectual bond of this already powerful organization ; but prudence required that measures should be adopted in anticipation of the time when the bond should be broken and the centre displaced.

This grave question occupied the attention of the Conference of 1769. Wesley proposed that at his death the preachers should nominate a kind of supreme council composed of three, five, or seven preachers, each of whom should in turn act as moderator, and under this title perform

the functions that had devolved upon himself. This plan, which was open to serious objections, was subsequently modified : that which was ultimately adopted will be considered in its proper place.

While the teaching body in Methodism was thus rapidly increasing, the Societies also made proportionate progress. In 1770 they numbered 29,406 members, scattered over the whole surface of the country, and already possessing a great number of chapels.

Their organization was gradually completed, retaining all the while the distinctive features which characterized it at the outset. The class-meeting became the pivot of the whole Society. From the year 1765 the custom became general, which had obtained in many places, of periodically giving each member a ticket, which served as a certificate of membership. So early as 1746, or even earlier, the whole field was divided into Circuits, each occupying the labours of one or more preachers ; and, from year to year, as the Revival spread, and the number of the agents increased, the Circuits multiplied in number, and diminished in extent.

The Conference of 1749 resolved that in each Circuit quarterly-meetings should be held whose business it should be to care for the local interests of the work of God. The various means of religious edification were adopted one by one. In 1749, watch-nights and love-feasts began to be held monthly : in 1755, Wesley introduced a special service, known by the name of the Renewal of the Covenant, the object of which is to bind the members to the service of God by an act of formal self-consecration. Days for fasting and prayer were also observed throughout the Societies. Thus we are presented with a great variety of stimulating and edifying ordinances, which could not but tend to the establishment of the people in the grace of God.

In conjunction with these means of grace, designed to

nourish the life of the Societies, there was also in constant operation the work of evangelizing the masses ; and this Wesley always looked upon as the great business both of himself and his followers. Hence he insists much on open-air preaching, which the multiplication of chapels tended to discourage. He recommends the distribution of religious books, as important auxiliaries to the preaching, and enjoins on his helpers the instruction of youth : he desires them to become pastors as well as evangelists, and advises them to visit the members of the Societies from house to house.

Thanks to his powerful genius as an organizer, Wesley had wrought his Societies into a homogeneous whole. That of itself guaranteed the stability and permanence of the work. Many questions, however, remained unsettled ; and these occupied the thoughts of the great missionary during his last years. Despite the energy of his spirit, he at times felt almost overwhelmed by the weight of his responsibility. "I did not seek any part of this power," he said in 1766, "it came upon me unawares ; but when it was come, not daring to bury that talent, I used it to the best of my judgment. Yet I never was fond of it : I always did, and do now, bear it as my burden ; the burden which God lays upon me, and therefore I dare not yet lay it down. But if you can tell me any one, or any five men, to whom I may transfer this burden, who *can* and *will* do just what I do now, I will heartily thank both them and you." "Preaching twice or thrice a day," he adds, "is no burden to me at all ; but the care of all the preachers and all the people is a burden indeed !"

The middle period of Wesley's ministry closes with the Conference of 1770. This Conference occupies, indeed, an important place in the history of that man of God. It recorded the commencement of Methodist labours in the field of Foreign Missions, since this year for the first time

America figures in the list of Circuits. This Conference also gave the signal for the last great Calvinistic controversy. This year also, upon the field of battle, Whitefield fell, Wesley's great coadjutor, and the only man of the century who equalled him. Wesley alone now fills the circle of vision, with as valiant a heart as ever carrying on his great life-work through the last decade of a green old age.

## BOOK FOURTH.

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### THE EVENING OF LIFE.

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(1770—1791.)

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#### CHAPTER I.

*WESLEY'S VIGOROUS OLD AGE.*

1770—1780.

WESLEY had now reached old age. Right bravely did he bear his threescore years and ten : that which for many is the period of repose was for him a period of activity ; and though his snow-white locks showed plainly that the winter of life had set in, yet his warm and genial spirit still gave proof that for such a man life is a perpetual spring.

Marvellously endowed in point of physical vigour, he enjoyed in advanced old age a degree of health which is too often denied to those that exceed the ordinary limits of earthly existence. Two illnesses which he had during this decade appear to have left no permanent effects upon his general health. One of these attacks was occasioned by a fall from his horse ; the other by a cold caught when he was in Ireland from sleeping at noon in an orchard, a habit which he had been accustomed to indulge in at times throughout his itinerant life. In both cases, medical skill and careful tendance warded off consequences which, in a

man of his years, might easily have proved fatal. On his seventy-first birthday he was able to say, "I find just the same strength as I did thirty years ago." Two years later, he again wrote in his journal, "I am seventy-three years old, and far abler to preach than I was at three and twenty." His voice was as strong as ever : his sight was better : his power of work had vastly increased. "I have none of the infirmities of old age," he says, "and have lost several I had in my youth." This astonishing physical vigour he attributes to several causes. "The grand cause is," he says, "the good pleasure of God, who doeth whatsoever pleaseth Him. The chief means are : 1. My constantly rising at four for about fifty years. 2. My generally preaching at five in the morning ; one of the most healthy exercises in the world. 3. My never travelling less, by sea or land, than four thousand five hundred miles in a year."

These incessant journeyings were not only essential to the prosperity of the work in which he was engaged : they had become a necessity of his own existence. Occasionally, we find him casting a momentary and pensive glance at the pleasures of a sedentary life. "I spent a useful and agreeable evening," he says in his journal, "in the midst of friends who are among the excellent of the earth. I was disposed to say, 'It is good for me to abide here.' But no ! The voice of God says, 'Go thou, and preach the Gospel.'" In his seventy-sixth year he writes, "I rested here. [Newcastle.] Lovely place, and lovely company ! But I believe there is another world ; therefore I 'must arise, and go hence.'" Such regrets were, however, very rare. His habitual frame of mind was a perfect serenity, which nothing could disturb. "I feel and grieve," says he, "but, by the grace of God, I fret at nothing." Nothing is more stimulating than the courageous activity of this venerable man, undismayed by the disappointments of life, and pursuing his labours with all the enthusiasm of youth.

Throughout this last period of his life, Wesley was still as heartily received as ever. His success was not an ephemeral blaze: it had lasted thirty years, and was continually increasing. The grey-headed preacher knew how to retain the sympathy which he had won in his earlier days. A new generation had grown up around him, and the children learned to revere the man of whose zeal and sufferings they had heard their fathers talk. The news of his approach was enough to ensure a vast multitude of hearers, gathered from all quarters. The so-called "pit" at Gwennap was always filled when he preached in it; and the voice of the septuagenarian still commanded audiences that reached to many thousands. At Birstal and Leeds, as well as in the metropolis, he addressed multitudes as vast as those of former times. "I preached in Moorfields," he says in 1775, "to a larger congregation than usual. Strange that their curiosity should not be satisfied yet, after hearing the same thing near forty years." Though his journeys were generally arranged beforehand, yet he preached a great deal as opportunity offered, in addition to his fixed appointments. He was frequently stopped on his journey and asked to preach: sometimes he found that a multitude of people had assembled of their own accord, and were waiting for him. When he had done, it was not always easy to escape from his audience: they refused to go away, and would have him to converse with them a little longer. "Whatever men may say," he writes, "as long as people show such an eagerness to hear, it is very clear that the time for open-air preaching is not past." With such audiences, it is no wonder that Wesley felt himself at home. "I was a little tired," he says in his journal, "before I came to Portsmouth, but the congregation soon made me forget my weariness. Indeed, the people in general here are more noble than most in the south of England. They receive the Word of God, 'with all readiness of mind.'"



Wesley's preaching always retained those characteristics which had contributed so largely to its success : it penetrated the souls of his hearers, aroused them from their torpor, and inspired a profound sense of their spiritual misery. Though no longer accompanied by those external manifestations which were so common at first, the work of conversion proceeded as vigorously as ever, as is witnessed by the records of the journals.

At Gwennap, one who had denied the faith and turned his back upon his brethren, was convinced of his sin under Wesley's preaching, and restored to the church which he had disgraced by his fall. At St. Agnes, after a sermon a young female followed him into the house, "weeping bitterly, and crying out, 'I must have Christ ; I will have Christ. Give me Christ, or else I die !'" The old missionary pointed her to her Saviour ; and while he was praying with her she was "filled with joy unspeakable, and burst out, 'O let me die ! Let me go to Him now ! How can I bear to stay here any longer ?'"

The power of Wesley's faith was displayed as much in his prayers as in his preaching. On one occasion, while he was praying in public, his mind suddenly reverted to a backslider, whose fall had created great scandal. He broke out abruptly, "Lord, is Saul also among the prophets ? Is James Watson here ? If he be, show Thy power." The poor man was there : he dropped down "like a stone, and began crying aloud for mercy."

Apart from the work of conversion, there were moral and material transformations everywhere wrought through the influence of Methodism, which Wesley could not but note in his progress through the country. The working-classes had been raised to a higher level of existence : the colliers were completely transformed. As he journeyed through the North, and admired the cottages embosomed in verdure, and everything wearing the appearance of

comfort and happiness, he could not but reflect that "three out of four, perhaps nine out of ten, had been built since Methodism had made its appearance in the country."

Methodism itself was everywhere rapidly spreading. Though Wesley had some sources of anxiety, they only served to set off the fair scenes of prosperity which offered themselves to his view. To the grand and irresistible outburst of the first days of the Revival had succeeded, almost universally, a work of internal edification which showed the strong hold its principles had taken on the minds of the people. Wesley's journals show us how skilfully he laboured to sustain this upward movement of the Societies.

In Cornwall, he met with the same encouragement as in former days. "Very few," he says, "of our old Society are now left : the far greater part of them are in Abraham's bosom. But the new generation are of the same spirit ; serious, earnest, devoted to God, and particularly remarkable for simplicity and Christian sincerity." Wales received Wesley's visits with all the enthusiasm of former times, and its Societies were prospering greatly. The same may be said of England generally. Of Shoreham, where his old friend Perronet was still living, he writes, "How is the last become first! No Society in the country grows so fast as this, either in grace or number. The chief instrument of this glorious work is Miss Perronet, a burning and a shining light." In the parish where another of his old friends had laboured, he says, "What has God wrought since Mr. Grimshaw and I were seized near this place by a furious mob, and kept prisoners for some hours! The sons of him that headed that mob now gladly receive our saying." The Nottingham society called forth the following observation : "There is something in the people of this town which I cannot but much approve of : although most of our Society are of the lower class, chiefly employed in the stocking manufacture, yet there is generally an uncom-

mong gentleness and sweetness in their temper, and something of elegance in their behaviour, which, when added to solid, vital religion, make them an ornament to their profession."

At Weardale, in the North, there occurred a remarkable awakening in the midst of a population composed chiefly of lead-miners. Numerous conversions took place, and the whole country was moved. Wesley describes this model Society in the following terms:—"In two respects this Society has always been peculiarly remarkable: the one, they have been the most liberal in providing everything needful for the preachers: the other, they have been particularly careful with regard to marriage. They have in general married with each other; and that not for the sake of money, but virtue. Hence ... they assist each other in training up their children; and God has eminently blessed them therein. For, in most of their families, the greatest part of the children, above ten years old, are converted to God."

Wesley visited Scotland several times during this period, and his preaching was appreciated both by rich and poor, though it did not meet with the marked success which attended it in other parts of Great Britain. The pulpits of the Established Church were everywhere open to him: the inhabitants of Perth conferred on him the freedom of their city. Wesley could not but congratulate himself on this friendliness: yet he complained of the cold and unimpressive manner in which they received the truths of the Gospel. He was a problem to them, and they to him.

Ireland was a far more fruitful field; and here his success was as great as ever. Not satisfied with visiting the principal centres of population, he penetrated the farthest recesses of the mountainous districts, in order to proclaim the good tidings of salvation to the ignorant and neglected inhabitants. The scenes he witnessed were such as recalled the early years of his missionary life. Here, we

find him preaching in a wood, under the shade of an old oak, while the rays of the setting sun played among the branches. There, he takes his stand in a public garden, while the crowd sit on the greensward on every side. Yonder, a tent is erected in the courtyard of an old castle, and from its shelter he addresses a regiment of soldiers, who listen with enthusiasm to his energetic and almost martial utterances.

The Irish people were generally so well disposed toward their favourite preacher, that they would at any time leave their business in order to hear him. His arrival at Cork one market-day was the signal for all to leave their merchandize, and they did not return to it till the preaching was finished. While he was preaching at Blackpool, it began to rain, but both preacher and hearers were equally undaunted, and none stirred till the sermon was ended. Once or twice the crowd, excited by the priests, indulged in a little hooting and stone-throwing ; but these aggressions were soon stopped, and order completely restored.

In fact, the Irish work was in full prosperity : the number of members increased continually, and in many places large and commodious chapels were built through the liberality of the Societies. While he rejoiced in these abundant proofs of prosperity, however, Wesley was alive to the dangers it involved. At Athlone, he says, "There is now no opposition either from rich or poor. The consequence of this is, there is no zeal, while the people 'dwell at ease.' O what state upon earth is exempt from danger ! When persecution arises, how many are offended ! When it does not arise, how many grow cold, and leave their 'first love !' Some perish by the storm, but far more by the calm. 'Lord, save, or we perish !' "

In Great Britain, the mob was everywhere conquered, and opponents durst not show their faces, so changed were the sentiments of the people toward Wesley. If at any

time a few reprobates meditated mischief, they soon had meted out to them a full and impartial measure of justice. His defenders sometimes offered him more protection than he required. One scapegrace, who interrupted the preaching with his shouts, found a warm reception, and retired from the scene of action covered with mud. Another, a drunkard whose outrageous behaviour disturbed the congregation, was taken to task by his wife, who seized him by the collar, and after administering salutary chastisement, marched him home amid the cheers of the people. Often, the multitude displayed a stronger sense of justice, and, instead of taking the law into their own hands, contented themselves with giving up the agents of mischief to the neighbouring magistrates. The magistrates themselves latterly acted like honourable men. One exception alone is recorded throughout this decade : a mayor sent two constables to prevent Wesley's preaching in the market-place ; but they were ashamed of their errand, and preferred to obey their consciences rather than their master.

The ascendancy that Wesley thus gained over the minds of the people was owing to his personal character. This is proved by the fact that at this very time other preachers suffered greatly from the violence of the multitude. William Darney was roughly handled, dragged through the mud, and trampled under foot by a mob stirred up by an intolerant priesthood. John Oliver was thrown into prison for preaching the Gospel. Nelson, Mather, Taylor, Rodda, who ranked among Wesley's most efficient auxiliaries, endured similar treatment. But Wesley knew how to control the evil passions of the populace : the power of his word and the prestige of his long service vanquished prejudice : it stood rebuked in the presence of that serene figure, crowned with locks of snowy whiteness. This influence he wielded, not only where he was well known, but also in places that he visited for the first time.

At Redmire, he met with but a chilling reception. "As I rode through the town," he says, "the people stood staring on every side, as if we had been a company of monsters. I preached in the street, and they soon ran together, young and old, from every quarter. I reminded the elder, of their having seen me thirty years before, when I preached in Wensley Church; and enforced once more, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.' When I rode back through the town, it wore a new face. The people were profoundly civil: they were bowing and courtesying on every side. Such a change in two hours I have seldom seen."

Although such an improvement had taken place in the dispositions of the people, it is only fair to acknowledge that it was not taught by the upper classes to the lower: on the contrary, it was the latter who set the example of tolerance and moderation. For a long time, those who by social position and intelligence should have been qualified to inspire the masses with a proper regard for order, forgot all self-respect, and behaved most indecorously in the presence of a plebeian gathering whose orderly and dignified bearing might well have put them to shame. Wesley complains strongly, in divers instances, of these "men whom English politeness calls gentlemen, but who behave worse than sailors or colliers." More than once these disturbers of the peace received well-merited rebukes from those who, though their inferiors in point of education, surpassed them in good sense and common decency. "Do you think I have need to be taught by a chaise-boy?" said one who had been making use of bad language to a groom who reproved him. "Really, Sir, I think you do," said the lad, and the "gentleman" stood confounded.

The clergy had in great measure lost their ancient prejudices against Wesley. If one bishop still laid his interdict upon the Methodists by denying them the sacraments,

as was the case in the Isle of Man, others recognized the nobleness of their achievements, and showed sincere respect to their great leader. The pulpits, once resolutely closed against him, were one by one thrown open, and the churches proved too small to hold the immense congregations that assembled to hear beneath their roofs that voice which, for more than forty years, had been awaking the echoes of the streets and the woods.

Wesley's journeys were so many visits of inspection designed to keep him acquainted with the real state of the work of God. For this spiritual episcopate he was admirably fitted ; and it possessed a far greater reality, and embraced a much vaster area, than that of the Anglican bishops. He possessed not only the comprehensive vision of the military general, who with one glance takes in the whole field of battle, but the still rarer faculty of minute investigation, which suffers no details to be neglected. In his visitation of the Societies he had regard not only to their general and collective interests, but also to those that were more special and local. He often had to act the part of a mediator between opposing parties, and this he did with so much impartiality, as well as so much prudence and tact, that he very seldom failed in accomplishing his end.

The Societies were, in fact, still agitated by questions of internal discipline, and it taxed Wesley's skill to prevent this agitation from becoming open rupture. He still, however, depended on Providence for a solution of these difficulties, and was always solicitous to impress on his Societies the practical character of the mission of Methodism. "Observe," says he to his preachers in 1778, "it is not your business to preach so many times, and to take care of this or that Society, but to save as many souls as you can ; to bring as many sinners as you possibly can to repentance, and with all your power to build them up in that holiness without which no man can see the Lord."

Wesley's excellence as a preacher was perhaps even surpassed by his skill in the cure of souls. His larger meetings seemed to him to have been almost resultless, except as they paved the way for close and personal conference with those who had received spiritual impressions. His pastoral labours were to him the necessary complement of his pulpit efforts.

The class-meeting was one of those creations of his organizing genius which gave so much stability and permanence to the work. He was fully alive to its importance, and everywhere endeavoured to promote the orderly working of this part of the Methodist machinery. Wherever he went, he visited the classes, and instituted a personal examination into the state of each of the members. Notwithstanding his innumerable engagements, he constantly devoted himself to pastoral visitation, and, at regular intervals, saw at their own homes all the members of his larger Societies at London, Bristol, and Newcastle. The sick had their place in his sympathies; his wide reading having furnished him with stores of medical knowledge, so that he could minister to their physical as well as spiritual necessities; and in London he established a dispensary, where medicine was gratuitously distributed to the poor.

In the course of these pastoral visits he was often the eyewitness of great misery. "I began visiting," he says in 1777, "those of our Society who lived in Bethnal-Green hamlet. Many of them I found in such poverty as few can conceive without seeing it. O why do not all the rich that fear God constantly visit the poor! Can they spend part of their spare time better? Certainly not.... Such another scene I saw the next day in visiting another part of the Society. I have not found any such distress, no, not in the prison of Newgate. One poor man was just creeping out of his sick bed to his ragged wife and three little children, who were more than half naked, and the



very picture of famine ; when one bringing in a loaf of bread, they all ran, seized upon it, and tore it in pieces in an instant. Who would not rejoice that there is another world ! ”

Toward such misery Wesley's heart ever overflowed with sympathy. His frugal life and simple tastes enabled him to devote a considerable part of his resources to works of benevolence. On one occasion, when in Ireland, his carriage stuck fast in a bog : while the men were endeavouring to extricate it, a poor man passed by, and Wesley, observing his profound dejection, inquired the cause. The man told him that he was in danger of being turned out of house and home, his landlord having threatened to eject him for arrears amounting to twenty shillings. Wesley put a sovereign in his hand, and the poor man fell on his knees, crying out, “ Now I shall have a house to shelter me,” and began to pray for his benefactor with all his might. “ I believe,” says Wesley, “ God answered his prayer by helping us out of the bog.”

He was still a zealous visitor of the prisons, and more than once had the happiness of leading condemned criminals to that Saviour who pardoned the penitent malefactor. In 1767, he had had a somewhat sharp controversy with Dr. Dodd, an Anglican preacher of some renown, and a clever writer, who, like many others, wished to break a lance with the founder of Methodism. Ten years rolled away, and Wesley had almost lost sight of his old antagonist, when he received a message begging him to come to him immediately. The brilliant preacher of former days was in prison on a charge of forgery. He was convicted of having counterfeited the handwriting of Lord Chesterfield, a former pupil of his, for the purpose of obtaining money ; and, according to the stringent legislation of those days, the penalty was death. Smitten with remorse and desirous of making his peace with God, the unfortunate

man sought the advice of Wesley, thus doing sincere homage to the piety of the man whom he had once so violently assailed. In the interviews that Wesley had with him, he showed all the signs of genuine repentance. Two days before his execution he paid him another visit, and was present while his wife took her leave of him. It was a touching scene. "O Sir," said he, in reply to the encouragements that Wesley offered him, "it is not for such a sinner as me to expect any joy in this world. The utmost I can desire is peace; and, through the mercy of God, that I have." "On Friday morning," continues Wesley, "all the prisoners were gathered together when he came down into the court. He seemed entirely composed. But when he observed most of them lifting up their hands, praying for him, blessing him, and weeping aloud, he was melted down, burst into tears too, and prayed God to bless them all. When he came out of the gate, an innumerable multitude were waiting, many of whom seemed ready to insult him. But the moment they saw him their hearts were changed, and they began to bless him and pray for him too. . . . One of his fellow-prisoners seemed to be in utter despair. Dr. Dodd, forgetting himself, laboured to comfort him, and strongly applied the promises. After some time spent in prayer, he pulled his cap over his eyes, and, sinking down, seemed to die in a moment. I make no doubt but in that moment the angels were ready to carry him into Abraham's bosom."

Though Bristol was at first the headquarters of Methodism, it was not long before London, as if by right, assumed that position. There Wesley kept up his largest establishment, and thence he started on his missionary travels. At the commencement of the present period the Fowerbury Chapel, opened in 1739, was still the principal Methodist sanctuary, and it could indeed boast a great history. In 1778, it was replaced by a more spacious and commodious chapel in

City-Road, the funds for the erection of which were raised by an appeal to the whole Connexion. City-Road Chapel, which is still a principal Methodist place of worship in London, was then the finest ecclesiastical edifice in the capital beyond the pale of the Anglican church ; and it will always be a structure admirably adapted to the purposes for which it was built.

From his printing-establishment in London, Wesley continued to issue innumerable publications, the literary labour in connection with which would alone have sufficed to employ the time of an active man. In 1773, he published an edition of his works in twenty-three volumes. In 1778, he commenced the publication of a monthly periodical, the "*Arminian Magazine*," which he edited to the end of his life, and which is still continued, under the title of the "*Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*." Among the productions of his busy pen we may mention certain political pamphlets called forth by the revolt of the American colonies, in which he views the subject from a thoroughly English standpoint. At the same time, in an eloquent letter to the prime minister, Lord North, he argues powerfully against the use of violent measures, and pleads for a policy of conciliation.

Before concluding this chapter we must spend a few words on the great controversy which broke out in 1770 between the followers of Wesley and those of his late great fellow-labourer, Whitefield, on the peculiar tenets of Calvinism. In this controversy, Wesley was only indirectly involved. It had its origin in a re-affirmation, by the Conference of 1770, of the original doctrinal principles of Methodism, in which the preachers were especially warned against Antinomian errors. The "*Minutes*," which embodied, perhaps in too concise a form, the views of the Conference, unfortunately revived grave questions which for many years had been permitted to sleep. Whitefield's

disciples regarded the document as an attack upon themselves, and, wresting the natural sense of his words, declared that Wesley had become the advocate of Pelagianism. To this statement the whole of his past life was a contradiction ; but for peace' sake he consented to explain the sense of the Minutes, and declared himself as much opposed as ever to the errors laid to his charge. These explanations were, however, powerless to check the tide of religious strife, and for a long time books and pamphlets in relation to it were multiplied. Wesley did not himself descend into the arena, but he found an able champion in his friend Fletcher. Had this controversy had no other result than that of unfolding the remarkable talents of this devoted man, it would have served a worthy end. But it served further to establish the decried Arminian doctrine upon solid foundations, and to prove to its adversaries that it was far from being the unsubstantial dream of mere enthusiasts. The general cessation throughout the country of strife upon these subjects, and the gradual abandonment on the part of the Calvinists of extreme views, are in great measure due to the polemical labours of this period.

While these discussions were a source of anxiety to many minds, they did not hinder the development of Methodism. This decade was emphatically a period of progress, and yielded a clear increase of 14,651 members and 52 itinerant preachers. The total number of members in England and America rose, in the year 1780, to 52,334 ; while the number of itinerant preachers amounted to 213, besides several hundreds of local preachers. In America the work had made wonderful strides, so much so as to compel Wesley to execute one of the most remarkable movements of his ecclesiastical course.

The body of preachers had been largely developed and strengthened in the course of these ten years. Among the new recruits were Francis Asbury, the father of American

Methodism, and one of its first bishops ; Joseph Benson, the commentator, who, expelled from Oxford for holding Methodist views, became one of the great lights of the Connexion ;—Samuel Bradburn, the Demosthenes of Methodism, of whom Dr. Clarke said that he never heard his equal ;—James Rogers, the ardent evangelist ;—John Valton, a young Frenchman, who, after having celebrated the mass as a chorister in his native country, became one of Wesley's choice companions and the instrument of several revivals ;—Henry Moore, the first biographer of Wesley, who during a ministry among the Methodists of sixty-five years was one of their most influential leaders ;—and lastly, Dr. Coke, who, having sacrificed a good position in the Church in order to identify himself with Methodism, became one of its brightest ornaments, and the founder of its great missionary enterprise.

Such accessions gave a higher status to Wesley's preachers, and formed a guarantee for the future of the body. That future was, indeed, already safe : the great work of the Revival was now being devolved on men whose piety and intelligence ensured its continuance after Wesley's death.

On this point he was himself fully satisfied, as is shown by the hopeful strain in which he thus wrote to a friend :—“The remark of Luther, ‘that a revival of religion seldom continues above thirty years,’ has been verified many times in several countries. But it will not always hold. The present revival of religion in England has already continued fifty years. And, blessed be God, it is at least as likely to continue as it was twenty or thirty years ago. Indeed, it is far more likely ; as it not only spreads wider, but sinks deeper, than ever ; more and more persons being able to testify that the blood of Christ cleanses from all sin. We have, therefore, reason to hope that this revival of religion, will continue, and continually increase, till the time when all Israel shall be saved, and the fulness of the Gentiles shall come.”

## CHAPTER II.

*LAST YEARS.*

1780—1790.

WESLEY had often prayed, "Lord, let me not live to be useless!" "Leisure and I," he was accustomed to say, "have taken leave of each other. If my health will permit, I propose to be busy as long as I live." God granted him the desire of his heart, and, thanks to an excellent constitution, he was enabled to pursue his apostolic labours to the close of a protracted life. At eighty-one, he writes, "I am as strong at eighty-one as I was at twenty-one; but abundantly more healthy, being a stranger to the headache, toothache, and other bodily disorders which attended me in my youth. We can only say, 'The Lord reigneth!' While we live, let us live to Him." A year later occurs in his journal the following astonishing note:—"By the good providence of God, I finished the eighty-second year of my age. Is anything too hard for God? It is now eleven years since I have felt any such thing as weariness: many times I speak till my voice fails, and I can speak no longer; frequently I walk till my strength fails, and I can walk no farther; yet even then I feel no sensation of weariness, but am perfectly easy from head to foot. I dare not impute this to natural causes: it is the will of God."

Wesley's mode of life was eminently favourable to bodily vigour. He rose regularly at four in the morning, and preached as regularly at five: he retired early to rest, and slept soundly, not having lost a night's rest for fifty years. Much was due, as he acknowledged, to the regularity of

his habits, and still more to the serenity of spirit which shielded him from oppressive cares by enabling him to see in all things the hand of God.

While his physical powers seemed exempt from the decrepitude which is the ordinary lot of old age, his intellect retained in equal measure its marvellous lucidity. "His associates," says one of his biographers, "could not perceive in him any signs of intellectual decay, nor can the critic detect any in his writings. Without the usual return of the mental weakness of childhood, there is apparent some return of its pure and simple freshness and vivacity. Increased sunshine seems to illuminate his daily life; he records beautiful impressions of nature and books more frequently: he compares and criticises Ariosto and Tasso; he indulges occasionally in dramatic reading and criticism; he discusses with zest the question of Ossian's poetry, then rife in literary circles; he notes, in brief but picturesque passages, the scenery of his out-door preaching, and the landscapes of his travels, and visits oftener, and describes more fully than ever, the gardens of the nobility. 'Elegant' buildings, (a phrase often applied by him with pleasure to new Methodist chapels,) and fine music and grand old ruins, excite his admiration.... He is no Puritan iconoclast. He is refreshed by the bursting forth of the spring in the north, and by the return of the singing-birds. 'How gladly would I repose awhile here!' he writes of a locality with a pleasant garden and shady walk around the neighbouring meadows, 'but repose is not for me in this world!'"\* "So fine an old man," says Alexander Knox, "I never saw. The happiness of his mind beamed forth in his countenance; every look showed how fully he enjoyed 'the gay remembrance of a life well spent!' Wherever he went, he diffused a portion of his own

\* Stevens, *History of Methodism*, vol. ii., pp. 197, 198.

felicity. While the grave and serious were charmed with his wisdom, his sportive sallies of innocent mirth delighted even the young and thoughtless : and both saw in his uninterrupted cheerfulness the excellence of true religion. In him even old age appeared delightful, like an evening without a cloud, and it was impossible to observe him without wishing fervently, ' May my latter end be like his ! ' "

It was impossible to gaze upon the countenance of this aged ambassador of Christ without feelings of respect, and even of reverence. Though short in stature, his physiognomy indicated profound seriousness, bordering indeed on austerity. His bright, piercing eyes lit up a finely-chiselled and expressive face with a peculiar glow : his large and lofty forehead indicated the man of intellect, while his firmly-knit lips bespoke the man of energy and decision. The whole countenance, set off by long flowing locks of snow-white hair reaching to the shoulders, had a singularly winning effect on all beholders. Internal peace irradiated his features with a sweet, expressive smile. As this venerable man walked the streets of the metropolis, with the quick step and earnest bearing which never forsook him, and as if still intent on buying up every moment of time, the passers-by stopped spontaneously and offered salutations of profound respect ; and in doing so they did homage to the moral grandeur of his well-spent life.

But it was in the pulpit more especially that this venerable old man produced the deepest impression : it was there that the majesty of his character was the most strikingly displayed. A portrait has come down to us, full of expression, sketched from one of the side-pews in the Foundry Chapel by a talented artist, who was a member of the congregation. The preacher is there pictured to the life, as occupying the sacred desk, and in the very attitude of preaching. The head is bent forward, and the countenance



illuminated with the glow of an almost mystic devotion : the prevailing expression is that of an unspeakable tenderness, which is evidently finding vent in fervid appeals, delivered with a voice, less melodious perhaps than of old, but still capable of giving forth powerful and pathetic tones. The flight of years has lined his countenance ; but this has lost neither the fire of youth nor the force of maturity ; and the mingled expression answers well to the complex character of his mind. One might call it a combination of Moses and St. John. In fact, in his preaching he did combine these two almost contradictory types, the severity of the Jewish lawgiver and the mildness of the beloved disciple. His eloquence, which for more than half a century had held such unbounded sway over his audiences, was Christian eloquence of the most genuine kind, such as is replenished, not from the turbid streams of a frivolous rhetoric, but at the living fountains of eternal truth.

In order to form a just idea of the influence wielded by Wesley over the English nation, we must follow him on his missionary tours. All the counties of England heard from this octogenarian the word of eternal life. He still preached twice and three times a day, while four or five hours' travel did not daunt his spirit in the least degree. Wherever he went, he was greeted with tokens of the most profound respect, and his utterances still excited the enthusiasm of the people. It appeared as if they strove to efface the memory of former trials by their manifestations of sympathy and respect. It will be sufficient to cast a rapid glance at Wesley's course through the latter period of his ministry.

At Grimsby, he preached in the churchyard, where the entire population assembled to hear him. At Witney, he took advantage of the fears excited by a terrible storm, and preached to an immense multitude on the great scenes of death and judgment, after which thirty-four persons

came to him and sought admission into the Society. At Epworth, he preached to a larger congregation than ever before: it was with deep emotion that he visited the churchyard, where he had preached on his father's tombstone, and, while musing on the gaps which death had made in the ranks of his old companions, he exclaimed, "It is very true that 'one generation passeth away, and another generation cometh up:' the earth loses its inhabitants as a tree sheds its leaves." At Kingswood, he was delighted to be among the colliers who had been civilized by his means, and to preach to them under the shade of the double row of trees which he had planted with his own hand forty years before; and his word seemed to gain energy from the reminiscences of the past. At Burslem, he had announced that he would preach at five in the morning, his favourite hour; but the impatience of the people was so great, that they assembled long before the time appointed, and, shortly after four, a band of musicians came to escort him to the chapel to the sound of music and singing. At Bingley, one of his assistants had to preach to one part of the congregation while he preached to another, as his voice could not reach them all. At Newark, the civic authorities requested that he would do them the honour to preach before them. At Plymouth, he had to be borne above the heads of the crowd to the pulpit, "and after a solemn parting, we took coach," he says, "at six, leaving such a flame behind us as was never kindled before. God grant it may never be put out!" At Bolton, he administered the Lord's Supper, with the help of several ministers, to twelve or thirteen hundred communicants. At Chester, he had the largest congregation that he had ever seen there. Of Castle-Carey he said, "How are the times changed! The first of our preachers that came hither, the zealous mob threw into the horse-pond: now high and low earnestly listen to the word that is able

to save their souls." At Gloucester also, he writes, "The scandal of the Cross (such is the will of God) is ceased. High and low, rich and poor, flock together, and seem to devour the word. I preached on building upon a rock, and spoke with all plainness. Many, I believe, were cut to the heart ; for it was a day of the Lord's power."

Such expressions constantly fell from Wesley's pen, and every page of his journals prove that his preaching produced the same effect in his old age as when he was yet in his prime. It still smote upon the consciences, and frequently, as at Coleford, "the flame broke out. Many cried aloud, many sunk to the ground, many trembled exceedingly ; but all seemed to be quite athirst for God, and penetrated by the presence of His power." The sobs of penitents, and the joyous exclamations of the saved, were now the only interruptions to Wesley's preaching, and his open-air services were attended by no disorder, save what might be occasioned by the extreme enthusiasm of the people.

Wesley's progress through Cornwall was a genuine ovation : in every town the whole population turned out to hear him. At Truro, notwithstanding an extraordinary storm, a large congregation assembled, and all were so profoundly affected under his sermon as to appear fully determined to save their souls. At Redruth, thousands upon thousands flocked together from all parts, and not only filled the streets but all the windows, while some climbed up to the roofs of the houses that they might see him and hear him. At Falmouth, where forty years before he had narrowly escaped death at the hands of the mob, he made his entry into the town in the midst of an enormous concourse of people. "High and low lined the street, from one end of the town to the other, out of stark love and kindness, gaping and staring as if the King were going by." Throughout the country, the chapels were too

small to contain the people, and he generally had to preach in the public places, formerly the arena of his conflicts with the mob.

Similar scenes took place in Ireland, where he everywhere received an enthusiastic welcome. As he was approaching Cork he was met by a cortege of thirty men on horseback, who came to conduct him into the city. His arrival created a profound sensation, and his preaching was attended by great success. The mayor invited him to his own house, and showed him "the lions" of the city : a Catholic priest, called Father O'Leary, who had once waged war with him in the newspapers, dined with him, and manifested the greatest respect. At Aughalan, he found such a congregation as he had not seen in the kingdom : tears of joy and cries were heard on every side, only so far suppressed as not to drown his voice. The same effects were produced at Enniskillen, "formerly a den of lions," but where "the lions had become lambs ;" and numerous conversions rewarded his labours there. Even among the mountains, he was astonished to see multitudes of people flock to his preaching. "One would wonder whence all the people came," he says ; "they seemed to spring out of the earth." In Ireland, as in England, the work was in full prosperity : for some years it had been taking rapid strides. The Dublin Society was still one of the most flourishing in the three kingdoms, and in 1787 Wesley spoke of it as second in importance to none but that of the metropolis itself.

This well-earned popularity Wesley availed himself of solely to promote the honour of his Master. "Fortunate would the artist have been who could have followed him, and preserved for his numerous people representations of the touching or grand scenes of these his last years,—his preaching in the Gwennap amphitheatre to audiences such as Whitefield probably never saw ; in Redruth-street, with

the wondering hosts hanging on the windows and roofs, as well as crowding the neighbouring streets ; his address in Newgate to forty-seven men who were under sentence of death, 'the clink of whose chains was very awful ;' but most of whom sobbed with broken hearts while he proclaimed that there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth ; or the night scene near Newcastle-under-Lyme, when the silvered locks of the untiring apostle gleamed in the clear moonlight as he stood, 'in the piercing cold,' preaching under the village trees to a multitude four times as large as could have got into the chapel."\*

During the last years of his life, Wesley was more than ever occupied in consolidating the Societies, and preparing them for the inevitable moment of his separation from them. The organization resulting from these endeavours will be described in another chapter. It was impossible, however, that such arrangements should be made without giving rise to some difficulties, and to these were added others of a local kind, such as were to be expected in so extensive an association as that which he had founded. At Bath, one preacher openly revolted against his authority, and refused to recognize the rights of a colleague who had been associated with him, and thus occasioned a breach in the Society. At Birstal and Dewsbury, similar schisms were produced by unruly spirits who wished to throw off all discipline. To heal such breaches as these was at any time a difficult and delicate task, but especially so in prospect of the crisis which was now impending : the spirit of insubordination, once let loose, might, on the removal of the living bond which united the Societies, have led to their utter dissolution. It was painful also to Wesley's mind to be occupied in such work as this at an

\* Stevens, vol. ii., p. 244.

age which should have been sacred to repose and peace. But his sense of duty was too strong for him to consult his own convenience or pleasure ; and he well knew how to apply the necessary remedies to the evils which prevailed in certain Societies, with the mingled firmness and moderation which constitute the essence of all good government. The very presence of the aged Pastor was often enough to allay the bitterest strife : the affability of his disposition won over the most determined opponents : the serenity of his spirit was contagious.

One of the most striking features in Wesley's character was his love of children. At an early period he had devoted himself to their spiritual interests, which hitherto had been very generally neglected. He exhorted his preachers to watch over them with great care, and always inquired how they had discharged this portion of their duty. These labours were followed by the best results, and many children were converted to God and joined to the Society. The school founded at Kingswood was several times visited by remarkable revivals, and became a veritable "school of the prophets." No recreation was so delightful to the great missionary as a few days' sojourn among his young pupils : he seemed to live his life over again and to grow young in their company. He loved to superintend their studies and to encourage their efforts : he prepared special editions of the classics for their use, and compiled grammars and other works suitable for youth. His presence and influence seemed to fascinate their minds. At Luton, most remarkable effects were produced by his visit to a school where discipline was sadly wanting. At Weardale, he admitted thirty children as members of the Society. In one place, a company of children came up to him after preaching, and he knelt down and prayed for them with the greatest fervour.

At another, he found the street full of children, who accompanied him to the house of God, and, when the service was over, would not leave till he had shaken hands with them all. These incidents show that children felt and reciprocated his affection.

The establishment of Sunday Schools met, from the first, with Wesley's warm approbation. As soon as Robert Raikes issued his pamphlet on the subject, in 1783, Wesley reprinted it in the "*Arminian Magazine*." In his journal of the year 1784 he speaks of them in terms almost prophetic: "I find these schools springing up wherever I go: perhaps God may have a deeper end therein than men are aware of. Who knows but some of these schools may become nurseries for Christians?" In 1787, he wrote to one of the preachers, congratulating him on the establishment of a school, and adding, "These schools appear to be one great means which God will make use of to revive religion in the nation." The year before his death he writes: "This is one of the best institutions which have been seen in Europe for some centuries."

Wesley's pastoral activity was not confined to personal intercourse with his Societies, but included a vast amount of epistolary correspondence. From all quarters letters were addressed to him, requesting counsel and advice; and he regarded it as a duty to reply to them. A large number of his letters have been preserved, and they show the energy he threw into his work and the attention he paid to its smallest details. When we add to this pastoral correspondence that which he was constantly carrying on with the majority of his preachers, as the necessities of the work required, we shall be struck with amazement at the immense responsibilities that weighed upon this valiant octogenarian. His last journeys were particularly affecting. "Among his older Societies in England," says the historian already quoted, "his visits are attended with unprecedented

success and affecting interest. The age of the venerable man saddens the people more than himself. Toward the close of this decade there are solemn leave-takings as he passes along his routes. At each visit they expect to see his face no more ; and at every place, after giving to his Societies what he wished them to receive as his last advice—to love as brethren, to fear God, and honour the king—he uniformly gives out and sings with them the following lines :—

‘ O that without a lingering groan  
I may the welcome word receive ;  
My body with my charge lay down,  
And cease at once to work and live ! ’

...The Methodists flock from place to place to hear him, for they know the privilege must soon cease. Companies go out to meet him, and conduct him into the towns. His preachers, who are now numerous in most parts of the land, gather in his assemblies, refreshing themselves by his ministrations, and by their mutual greetings : he is to them as Elijah to the ‘ sons of the prophets,’ a man who had uttered wondrous words and wrought miracles in Israel, and the day of whose ascension in the chariot of fire is at hand.”\*

Wesley’s missionary labours during this last decade were not limited to Great Britain itself. In response to a pressing invitation, he paid two visits to Holland, where his reputation had long been widely spread, and where many Christians desired to see him. He preached in English at the Hague, Utrecht, Amsterdam, and Rotterdam, conversed in Latin with many ministers and professors, whose spirit seemed to him to be excellent ; and was received with profound respect by the best families in the land, whose solid piety was a source of great delight to his mind. He returned full of the praises of Holland and the

\* Stevens, vol. ii., pp. 243, 244.



Dutch. "We always looked upon the Dutch as a heavy, dull, stoical people ; but truly, most—nay, I may say, all—with whom we conversed familiarly were as tender-hearted and as earnestly affectionate as the Irish themselves."

A little later, he visited the Channel Islands also. Methodism had been imported into these islands, not direct from England, but from Newfoundland, where two Jersey merchants had been converted under a Methodist preacher. On returning to their native country in 1774, they laboured to promote the salvation of their neighbours ; and, their efforts being crowned with success, they wrote to Wesley to request his help. He sent to their assistance, in 1784, Robert Carr Brackenbury, a wealthy man and a talented preacher, who was able to speak French. The increasing success of the work induced Wesley to visit the Islands himself in 1787. After a dangerous passage he disembarked, and immediately set to work, preaching and visiting incessantly. At Guernsey, he was entertained by the De Jersey family, whose house, called *Mon Plaisir*, was the home of the preachers, and who shortly after gave to the French work one of its missionary pioneers. At Jersey, he enjoyed a most cordial reception, was entertained by the most distinguished families, and preached to eager multitudes the Word of Truth. In the country parishes, where English was not understood, Wesley availed himself of the services of Brackenbury as an interpreter.

The state of the work in the Islands gratified him exceedingly. He met with many Christians whose devotion was not surpassed by that of any in England. He mentions particularly Jane Bisson, of Jersey, a young lady of nineteen, as a person of extraordinary piety. "She seems," he says, "to be wholly devoted to God, and to have constant communion with Him. She has a clear and strong understanding, and I cannot perceive the least tincture of enthusiasm. I am afraid she will not live long

I am amazed at the grace of God which is in her. I think she is far beyond Madame Guyon in deep communion with God ; and I doubt whether I have found her fellow in England. Precious as my time is, it would have been worth my while to come to Jersey, had it been only to see this prodigy of grace." He was so struck with her piety, that he desired to correspond with her ; and the thirteen letters addressed to her, the last of which is dated but a few months before his death, show the paternal care with which he fostered the best interests of those who shared his pastoral oversight.

The Societies in the Islands had sprung up spontaneously and without foreign assistance : they were also becoming well organized, being already provided with a body of preachers who could address the people in their own tongue. At the time of Wesley's visit, a young man, named John De Queteville, originally from Jersey, had already spent one year in the work of the ministry, and for more than half-a-century he continued to be identified therewith. In view of such rapid progress, Wesley was fully persuaded that the Societies possessed an unconquerable vitality, and that a great future was reserved for them. He perceived clearly the important part they might play in the evangelization of the neighbouring country. Standing one day within sight of the coast, and speaking of the impossibility of his ever undertaking the conquest of that great country, the aged missionary pointed to the dusky cliffs that skirted the horizon, and expressed his conviction that the Channel Isles were destined to take part in the work of the conversion of France. Three years later this prediction began to be verified,\* and, down to the present day the

\* In 1790, a few Methodists from Guernsey visited Caen and the neighbourhood. Shortly after, M. Mahy established himself there as a regular preacher, and continued his labours in Normandy for several years, with much success.

But it was not till the close of the great European struggle in 1815

Islands have faithfully striven to realize Wesley's expectations, having furnished at least thirty labourers to the work of the Gospel in France.

Such was Wesley's activity, that all England was too narrow a field for it : it sought yet wider expansion. He had said, "The world is my parish ;" and before he died he saw the object of his vast Christian ambition beginning to be realized : where he could not go himself he went in the person of his auxiliaries. It was during this period, in fact, that Methodism began to take deep root in the New World, and to prove its perfect adaptation to the work of missions, properly so called. To this subject we shall return in the next chapter.

Although during the early part of this decade Wesley could still congratulate himself on having almost completely escaped the infirmities of age, toward the close of it he began to experience a change. It was when he was completing his eighty-fifth year that he first noticed symptoms of declining vigour : he could not walk so fast as he did formerly, his sight was a little decayed, and there was some failure of his memory with regard to names and things lately past. But he still felt no such thing as weariness, either in travelling or preaching, nor was he conscious of any decay in writing sermons. On entering his eighty-seventh year, he says, "I now find I grow old ;...what I should be afraid of is, if I took thought for the morrow, that my body should weigh down my mind ; and create either stubbornness, by the decrease of my understanding ; or peevishness, by the increase of bodily infirmities : but

that the foundations of French Methodism were permanently laid. In that year, "William Toase, accompanied by Richard Roberts and Benjamin Frankland, passed into Normandy, and in 1818 Charles Cook followed them. He became the chief founder of French Methodism."

Thou shalt answer for me, O Lord my God!" God spared His servant the total decline of his faculties which he feared. He retained his marvellous lucidity of intellect, and was enabled to the last to devote his whole attention to the great religious movement of which he had been so eminent a promoter.

His earlier fellow-labourers had many of them long since disappeared, and, during these last years of his life, he was called to witness the departure of the few survivors. He took leave of them in perfect serenity of mind, as one parts from friends whom one hopes shortly to see again. Now we find him at the bedside of Thomas Maxfield, his first lay-preacher, from whom he had been compelled to separate, but for whom he had retained a deep affection. Then he calls on Perronet, the venerable vicar of Shoreham, to receive the last counsels and benedictions of this aged patriarch of the Revival, who had passed his ninetieth year. At another time it is Delamotte, his ancient companion in Georgia, whom he finds bending, like himself, under the weight of years, and preparing to pass from the burdens and trials of life into his final rest. A little later, Thompson, the rector of St. Gennis and Wesley's Cornish coadjutor, finding himself assailed by doubts and fears at the approach of death, sends for him, partakes of the Lord's Supper with him, and regains during the interview the calm and confident faith which had been for a moment disturbed.

Two other losses Wesley suffered, which affected him the most deeply of all. In 1785, died, in the full triumph of faith, the devoted John Fletcher, whose life had been that of a saint and an apostle. In losing him, Wesley lost his best friend, his best adviser. No man in England, not even his brother, entered so deeply into his sympathies, and understood so thoroughly his mission. He was the St. John of the Revival, while Wesley was its St. Paul.

Everything in him, the heart as well as the intellect, responded to the Methodist movement; and it is no small honour that it should have had the sanction of his lofty intelligence and profound piety. Wesley had long entertained the thought that he might leave the superintendence of the work to him after his death, and was deeply afflicted by his loss. "Within fourscore years," he says, "I have known many excellent men, holy in heart and life, but one equal to him I have not known; one so uniformly and deeply devoted to God. So unblamable a man, in every respect, I have not found either in Europe or America, nor do I expect to find another such on this side eternity."

Three years later, in his brother Charles, Wesley lost another faithful companion of his ministry. With all the intrepidity which distinguished his character, he had shared his brother's early struggles; but he soon renounced an itinerant life, and settled with his family in Bristol, and afterwards in London, where he still exercised his ministry, preaching in the chapels, and visiting the sick and the prisoners. A poet of the first rank, a distinguished orator, ardent and enthusiastic in temperament, he threw himself fully into the work his brother was carrying on, and in some respects formed his complement and counterpart. He was wanting, however, in the qualities essential to the legislator and organizer, and he sometimes hampered his brother's action by his exaggerated ecclesiastical scruples. Nevertheless, he was one of the choicest labourers engaged in the Revival of the eighteenth century.

While the hand of death was thus removing Wesley's first fellow-labourers, God raised up others in their stead: an ever increasing number of candidates entered the ranks of the itinerant ministry. Among the recruits of these last ten years were men of varied talents; but the body of preachers could not but be adorned as well as strengthened

by such men as Joyce, Bramwell, Reece, Dickenson, Entwisle, Creighton, and Adam Clarke.

All the deaths that Wesley witnessed added their testimony to that of his infirmities, and told that his end was nigh. The prospect, far from being alarming, was to him delightful. His work was done, and well done. Its future success was a certainty, as far as certainty is permitted to faith that stays itself upon God, and does not despise the dictates of prudence. Before dwelling on the closing scenes, we must contemplate the measures adopted to ensure the continuance and stability of the work.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### *ORGANIZATION OF THE AMERICAN METHODIST CHURCH.—DEED OF DECLARATION.*

1784.

WE have already related the early history of Methodism in America. Within the space of a very few years it developed rapidly, and attained large proportions: the long conflicts of the revolution did not arrest its progress, and, fifteen years after the arrival of Wesley's first preachers, it already counted twenty thousand members, and more than eighty itinerant preachers; while its operations extended from the West Indies in the south, to New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland in the north. Many questions of organization, which did not at first present themselves, began now to be raised.

In entering on their work in the New World, Wesley's preachers regarded themselves as occupying the same relative

## 218 *Organization of the American Methodist Church.*

position toward the Anglican clergy as their brethren at home, viz., that of extraordinary auxiliaries : consequently, they did not intermeddle with ecclesiastical functions, properly so called, and in particular refused to administer the sacraments. If it was difficult in England to maintain this attitude, in America it soon became utterly impossible. With a population scattered over a vast extent of country, and always on the increase, and with a clergy few in number and feeble in spirit, and who confined their efforts to the great cities, to remain in this subordinate relation would have been seriously to cripple and, in fact, to renounce the magnificent enterprise which God had committed to Methodism.

The War of Independence brought the question to a narrow issue, and necessitated its solution on the "liberal" side. This great revolution for awhile threatened the very life of the cause : most of the English preachers in America believed it their duty to employ their influence in counteracting the insurrection, and to remain faithful to the Government of their own country. Hence, throughout the period of the war, their situation was exceedingly embarrassing : some were imprisoned, others sought concealment, and others returned to England. But when the triumph of the revolution had secured the independence of the United States, the preachers perceived that they had no other alternative than to give in a loyal adhesion to the new order of things. Their sovereign, indeed, set them the example in those remarkable words of his, addressed to the ambassador of the new republic on his first reception at court, "I was the last in my kingdom to recognize your independence, and I shall be the last to violate it." In rallying to the side of the new Government, the leaders of American Methodism carried with them the sanction of the great majority of their Societies. Like the country to which they belonged,

they were now about to enter upon an entirely new phase of existence.

The new Government wisely declined the responsibility of establishing a national religion : and hence the Anglican Church ceased to retain its peculiar privileges, and was placed on a level with all others. Its revenues, like those of the nonconforming churches generally, were limited to the voluntary contributions of its flocks. Such a position was a most unenviable one for the clergy ; and, with such uncertain prospects before them, the greater part judged it prudent to retire : their flight became, in fact, a general *saute-qui-peut*. The fall of the Anglican Church, notwithstanding its great name, was an event full of significance. In Virginia, before the revolution, it counted ninety-one pastors : of these, at the close of the war, there only remained twenty-eight, the rest having returned to England. In the other parts of the country, the Established Church had never been strong, and the march of events had led to its dissolution. The way, therefore, was open for a successor, and that successor must be whichever of the Churches might prove itself worthy of the post. The crisis was one of the highest moment, and demanded heroic resolution.

Wesley understood the situation. If hitherto he had wished Transatlantic Methodism to retain the position of a parasitical plant, growing up under the doubtful protection of a mighty overshadowing oak, God Himself had abased the monarch of the forest, that the sapling might henceforth live a life of its own.

Wesley was not slow to perceive that the American Societies needed to be placed upon an independent basis. For a long time they too had demanded the administration of the sacraments by their own preachers : in many places the children were growing up without baptism, and the members of the Societies met without partaking of the Lord's



## 220 *Organization of the American Methodist Church.*

Supper. The demand became so urgent and was backed by arguments so powerful that there was considerable danger of a schism, if the wants of the people remained longer unsupplied. The Southern preachers, seeing that the question was not advancing toward a settlement, met together in the year 1779, and resolved that the three oldest of the brethren should lay hands upon the rest. This was accordingly done, and for a year the Societies in those parts received the sacraments from the hands of their preachers. This bold step must have plunged American Methodism into great confusion and led to a lamentable schism, had not Asbury, by a policy of conciliation, succeeded in effecting a compromise, which practically suspended the operation of this measure until Wesley had been consulted.

The gravity of these indications could not be mistaken. Wesley had to choose between two alternatives, either to sacrifice a work evidently destined for a great future, by making himself the obstinate champion of ecclesiastical prejudices, or to break loose from such prejudices altogether, and so secure the future development and prosperity of these new-born churches. As soon as the problem assumed this definite form, both his conscience and his reason concurred in his decision. As to the steps which were to be adopted, he wished to avoid unnecessary haste; and, above all, he resolved to make advances first to the Anglican episcopate. Hence, he addressed two several letters to the Bishop of London, earnestly requesting ordination for one of his preachers, in order that he might visit the Societies for the purpose of administering the sacraments, and thus provide for the most pressing necessities of the case. "I mourn," says he to the prelate, "for poor America, for the sheep scattered up and down therein,—part of them have no shepherds at all, particularly in the northern colonies; and the case of

the rest is little better, for their own shepherds pity them not." The bishop having refused to grant him this request, Wesley felt that nothing more was to be expected from that quarter, and decided to cut the Gordian knot.

Strongly attached as he was to the Established Church, of which he ever considered himself a minister, it was natural that Wesley's sympathies should be in favour of Episcopacy. This preference did not blind him, however, to the shocking abuses which the Anglican hierarchy inherited from Roman Catholicism. His ecclesiastical prejudices fell one by one : the apostolical succession he saw to be a mere fable : Episcopacy itself lost much of its prestige when the study of antiquity discovered to him that the terms "bishop" and "elder" originally denoted the same office. These were not casual impressions, derived from the necessities of the passing moment : they were the legitimate fruits of his entire religious development. We have seen how, forty years before, viz., in 1746, he declared that, after a thorough examination of the subject, he had come to the conclusion that in the primitive Church "bishops and presbyters were essentially one and the same order." This conviction he records a few years later in his Notes on the New Testament, where he declares that, in his opinion, the names of bishop and presbyter, or elder, were promiscuously used in the first ages.\* In 1760, he states in a letter to a friend, that he does not share in "the error of those who hold that the episcopal order alone is valid." So far from believing in the Divine right of Episcopacy, he affirms, in 1756, that this system is nowhere "prescribed in Scripture," and sums up the whole subject by asserting his belief that neither Christ nor His Apostles prescribed any particular form of Church government.

\* Note on Philippians i. 1.

## 222 *Organization of the American Methodist Church*

These quotations, which might be easily multiplied, show that Wesley had at an early period manifested a spirit of independent thinking which was exceedingly rare in those days ; and that the organization of the Methodist Church in America was not, as has been said, an error to be set down to the account of old age, but the natural result of his entire previous development. It was fully in accordance with this that he should write, in 1785, "I firmly believe, I am a Scriptural *episcopos*, as much as any man in England or in Europe. For the uninterrupted succession I know to be a fable which no man ever did or can prove."

Being free from all prejudice on these points, and possessed of clear convictions, he only delayed the emancipation of his Societies in obedience to the ruling principle of his ministerial course, viz., that of watching the openings of Providence before entering on any new path. Such an opening now presented itself, and he obeyed the signal to advance.

The task that lay before him was to organize his American Societies into a Church capable of self-government, and Wesley did not hesitate to choose the Episcopal form of administration, as better calculated than any other to maintain the unity and stability of the various portions of the work, a principle which he accounted of the highest importance. Fully convinced of his duty in this matter, and taking little thought as to the opposition he might arouse, he communicated his intentions to several friends ; and, although his brother Charles was too strongly wedded to his ecclesiastical prejudices to look with favour upon the scheme, he was pleased to find that Fletcher gave it his hearty approbation. In February, 1784, he broached the subject to the man to whom he wished to entrust the task of founding and organizing the Methodist Church in the United States. Dr. Coke was,

indeed, the man best fitted to conduct this delicate business to a successful issue, uniting in himself all the qualities of an administrator as well as of a missionary. Wesley reminded him of the exceptional position of the American Societies and of the dangers to which they would be exposed if left to themselves: he laid before him his plans for their organization into a Church, and asked whether he would consent to carry them into execution. If so, he felt called upon, as the general superintendent of the whole work, to lay hands on him and so delegate to him the power to organize the new Church. He recalled the example of the ancient Church of Alexandria, in which the elders, on the death of a bishop, met for the purpose of laying hands on one of themselves, who was thus called to occupy the vacant office as a *primus inter pares*, first among equals.

Dr. Coke, who did not expect such a proposition, requested time to consider the subject. For two months he gave it his serious attention, and at the end of that time he communicated his decision to Wesley. He admitted the legitimacy of such a step, but thought it prudent to delay taking it a little longer.

The Conference that met at Leeds in July of the same year did not concur in this opinion, and warmly approved of the measures proposed by Wesley. Fletcher took an active part in the deliberations, and his advice exerted a decisive influence on the result. In view of the general unanimity of his brethren, Coke could hesitate no longer; and on the 2d of September, 1784, at Bristol, Wesley, assisted by the Rev. James Creighton, solemnly laid hands upon him and set him apart to the office of Superintendent: these are the very terms employed in the document which Wesley delivered to him. He purposely avoided the term bishop, in order to show that the commission he had laid upon him had nothing

## 224 *Organization of the American Methodist Church.*

in common with the pompous forms of the Anglican Episcopacy, and that the true type of this imposition of hands was not to be sought in the Anglican hierarchy but in the Church of the primitive age.

At a later period, the American Church did give this scriptural title to those who were in truth performing the duties of the office ; and this course was perfectly justifiable. After laying hands on Coke, Wesley ordained two of his preachers, Vasey and Whatcoat, to accompany him, as presbyters, to America.

Doubtless, from the Anglican point of view, such ordinations were mere nullities. That of Coke, in particular, excited strong animadversion : Wesley, it was said, did not possess episcopal power, and therefore could not confer it. In strict canon law, that could not be disputed for a moment : and the clamours that arose were loud and strong. For our part, not sharing the prejudices of Anglicanism, we cannot espouse her quarrel. The sole blame that we should be disposed to attach to Wesley is that of having so long delayed to yield to the imperious necessities of the work. Let ecclesiastical formalism condemn Wesley : both conscience and common sense acquit him.

On the 3d of November, 1784, Coke, accompanied by his two colleagues, reached America, and shortly after conferred episcopal ordination on Francis Asbury, whose talents and virtues had made him for many years the real leader of American Methodism. Toward the close of the year, a Conference was held at Baltimore, attended by sixty preachers, who then laid the foundations of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Neither these preachers nor Wesley himself could have had the least suspicion that the Church whose foundations they then laid, amid opposition and contradiction of every kind, was to become the largest and most influential of the Churches of the New

World. Its magnificent success has furnished a sufficient reply to the objections made to Wesley's line of action. If Methodist Episcopacy cannot boast of having sprung from a so-called apostolical succession, its history abounds in proofs of the Divine approbation; and while, in our days, Anglicanism has to contend with the combined evils of Rationalism and Ritualism, the Methodist Episcopal Church increases and multiplies, proving by its rapid progress that the ecclesiastical system adopted by Wesley was best fitted to satisfy the wants of the American people and the exigencies of an essentially missionary work.

After what he had done for America, Wesley must have found it difficult to decline the same offices for his Societies at home. But he believed it to be his duty not to make too great haste: the circumstances were widely different, and he acted with the greatest circumspection, wishing to be guided by the course of events. The necessities of the work and the prospect of approaching death decided him, however, to take some steps in this direction: in 1786 he laid hands on six or seven preachers destined for Scotland and the West Indies. Three years later, in deference to the loudly-expressed wishes of the Societies in England, he ordained several more. Some twenty preachers in all thus received imposition of hands, it being a principle with him not to break with the existing order of things beyond what was strictly necessary. Methodism, however, had now taken an important step in advance of its former position: an enormous difficulty had been removed out of its path: the way was already open, and Wesley's successors had but to wait the hour when the Societies should arrive at that full and complete independence which was their undoubted right.

The later Conferences presided over by Wesley made farther advances in the same direction. In 1786, the rule against holding public services in church-hours was

rescinded in the following cases, viz., wherever the clergy were notoriously wicked or dangerously heretical; where there were not churches enough in the town to accommodate half the people; and lastly, where there was no church within two or three miles. In 1788, the wishes of the Societies were still further acceded to by the decision that services might be held in church-hours except on Communion days, and that if a majority of the members desired it, the Liturgy might be used in the chapels on Sunday mornings.

The year 1784, which gave birth to the organization of the American Church, witnessed also the adoption of measures designed to secure the legal existence of Methodism after the death of its Founder. Up to this time, the deeds of the chapels had conveyed them to trustees, for the use of such preachers as might be appointed by Wesley, or, after his death, by the Conference. Several eminent lawyers were consulted as to the validity of these trusts, and they declared that they would be nullified by Wesley's death, inasmuch as the existence of the Conference was not recognized by the law, and it had no power to acquire or possess property. This was a serious difficulty, and one that threatened the future existence of the whole Connexion. In order to remedy this, Wesley had a deed enrolled in the Court of Chancery, entitled a Deed of Declaration, which gave the Conference a legal existence, and conferred upon it the necessary powers.

According to this document, the legal Conference was to consist of one hundred preachers mentioned by name, who were to meet once a year, to fill up the gaps made in their ranks by death, and to appoint a president and secretary. Various rules were laid down respecting the election of members of the Legal Hundred, and their principal business. That business included the admission of preachers on trial, and into "full connexion" with the

Conference, the expulsion of unworthy members, and the stationing of the preachers, whose stay in each Circuit was not to exceed three years. The Deed also provided that the legal Conference should be at liberty to admit to their sessions any other preachers that might be in "full connexion." It also declared in what circumstances the Conference should be dissolved, viz., if at any time it should number less than forty members, or cease to meet for three years.

This settlement tended greatly to ensure the unity and perpetuity of the Connexion. Without such a fundamental bond the Societies would soon have lost the peculiar organization which constituted their strength, as for example the itinerancy, and would have become a heterogeneous assemblage of independent churches. On the other hand, it is to be regretted that with respect to some details of organization the Deed should have limited the action of the Conference, and so barred the introduction of such improvements as time might show to be needful. Of such drawbacks, doubtless, Wesley made little account: he saw the incontestable advantages which this arrangement afforded in reference to the cohesion of the Societies and the work of evangelization, and congratulated himself on the guarantee thus furnished that the work of his life should not terminate in inextricable confusion or total collapse. In the joy of his heart he describes this Deed as "such a foundation as is likely to stand as long as the sun and moon endure."



## CHAPTER IV.

*WESLEY'S LAST LABOURS.—HIS DEATH.*

1790—1791.

On the first of January, 1790, Wesley wrote in his journal : "I am now an old man, decayed from head to foot. My eyes are dim ; my right hand shakes much ; my mouth is hot and dry every morning ; I have a lingering fever almost every day ; my motion is weak and slow. However, blessed be God, I do not slack my labour : I can preach and write still." He did, in fact, pursue his ordinary labours to the end, notwithstanding the increasing infirmities of age.

London and its vicinity always received his special attention, and he still bestowed his best energies as a pastor and missionary upon this important field of labour. His sermons, though no longer delivered with the startling vigour of former days, were always listened to by immense audiences with sympathy and profound respect. A few brief extracts from his journal will best portray these last scenes.

On the 3rd of January, he writes : "I suppose near two thousand met at the New Chapel to renew their covenant with God ; a scriptural means of grace which is now almost everywhere forgotten, except among the Methodists."

On the 14th of February : "I preached a sermon to the children at West-Street Chapel. They flocked together from every quarter ; and truly God was in the midst of them, applying those words, 'Come, ye little children ; hearken unto Me, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord.'"

On the 27th : "In the evening I had such a congregation at Snowfields, as has not been seen there for many years. Afterwards, I met the penitents for the last time. They quite filled the room ; and God was in the midst of them."

On the 28th : "We have not had such a congregation at the New Chapel since the renewal of the covenant, nor such a blessing ; the hearts of the people were like melting wax. Most of them were in tears ; and I trust they will not soon forget the exhortation which was then given them. In the afternoon, I preached at West-Street Chapel, on Eph. v. 1, 2. The chapel would not near contain the congregation. All that could squeeze in seemed much affected, and it was with difficulty I broke through and took chaise for Brentford, where I came before six o'clock. The congregation here also was by far the largest I ever saw here, so that it seems our labour even here will not be in vain."

In the spring he commenced his last great missionary journey. Early in the year, his friends in London had sent a circular letter to all the Societies, announcing his intention to visit them, and indicating the route he was to take, and the places at which he was to preach, from Stroud to Aberdeen : it concludes in the following terms : "We earnestly recommend that Mr. Wesley be remembered in prayer, especially at the next Quarterly Fast, that his strength may be sustained and even increased, if it be the will of God."

This journey occupied three whole months, and Wesley endured the extraordinary fatigue as courageously as ever. A narrative so interesting claims more than a cursory glance.

At Bath, he addressed a congregation, "serious as death." "Indeed," he adds, "the work of God seems to flourish here, deepening as well as widening." At Bristol, he

"found a people ready prepared for the Lord. The preachers are in earnest, the fruit of which plainly appears in the congregations." Among the Kingswood colliers, who revered him as a father, his visits were always hailed with delight; and now, he says, "I preached to such a congregation as I have not seen there on a week-day for forty years, unless it was at a watch-night." At Stroud, Painswick, Gloucester, Tewkesbury, and Stourport, the congregations were too large for the chapels, and multitudes went away, unable to obtain even standing room.

At Birmingham, we see him entering the district in which Methodism had had its greatest conflicts, and achieved some of its most brilliant victories. The Society in this town delighted him greatly. On the evening of his arrival, an immense congregation of people of all classes assembled to hear him. "The behaviour of the rich and poor is such as does honour to their profession: so decent, so serious, so devout, from the beginning to the end." On the Sunday, he preached again at the "new house," which he describes as "admirably well constructed." Hundreds of persons "could not get in." But he says, "I think all who did, found that God was there."

Wednesbury, the scene of one of his most fearful persecutions, had now become one of the strongholds of Methodism. "The work of God greatly revives. Business has exceedingly decreased, and most of our old friends have left the town. So much the more have the poor grown in grace, and laid up treasure in heaven. But we were at a great loss in the evening. I could not preach abroad after sunset, and the house would not near contain the people. However, as many as possibly could, squeezed in, and their labour was not in vain."

At Dudley, he preached in the "new house, one of the greatest in England. It was a profitable season, where 70 persons, they informed me, found peace with God."

At Madeley, he no longer found his excellent colleague Fletcher, now gone to his rest, but he found a living memorial of him in the state of the work, which still continued to increase. The rain "did not hinder the church from being thoroughly filled, and I believe all who had spiritual discernment perceived that it was filled with the presence of God." He adds,—two days after,—“I finished my sermon on the Wedding Garment, perhaps the last that I shall write. My eyes are now waxed dim, my natural force is abated. However, while I can, I would fain do a little for God, before I drop into the dust.”

After spending three days in the parish of his late friend, Wesley resumed his journey northward, with a spirit even greater than his strength. At Newcastle-under-Lyme and at Burslem, regardless of the additional labour thus imposed upon him, he preached in the open air. At Tunstall, he “preached in the new chapel, the most elegant,” he says, “I have seen since I left Bath. My text was, ‘Let us go on unto perfection;’ and the people seemed to devour the word.” At Congleton, the principal clergyman, with the mayor and all the heads of the town, were present at his preaching. On Good Friday he reached Manchester, where he spent several days with his excellent friends. On Easter Sunday he preached twice, without fatigue, and administered the Lord’s Supper to sixteen hundred communicants. The following day, he tells us, “calling at Altringham, I was desired to speak a few words to the people in the new chapel; but almost as soon as I got thither, the house was filled, and soon after, more than filled. So I preached on 1 Peter i. 3; and many praised God with joyful lips. About twelve I preached in the chapel at Northwich, to a large and very lively congregation, and in the evening met once more with our old affectionate friends at Chester. I have never seen this chapel more crowded than to-night; but still it could not near contain

the congregation." At Liverpool, his presence created quite as great a sensation as at Manchester. Wigan is no longer "wicked Wigan," as it was "for many years proverbially called:" the "inhabitants in general have taken a softer mould." The Society at Bolton, one of the liveliest in England, "by patient continuance in well-doing, have turned scorn and hatred into general esteem and goodwill."

A note is here inserted in the printed copies of the journal, stating that "part of the manuscript having been lost, causes a chasm here." This chasm extends from April 10th to May 24th. An interesting part of his labours during this period we can fortunately supply from another source. On leaving Bolton he proceeded into Yorkshire, and, though he did not actually visit Halifax, he preached in the chapel at Bradshaw, on a Monday morning. The announcement having been made at Halifax the day preceding, a congregation more than sufficient to fill the chapel assembled at the hour of ten. But, owing to his increasing infirmities, Wesley was unable to reach the chapel till one o'clock, during which interval the congregation remained in the chapel with the greatest possible patience. When he arrived, the scene was truly affecting. As the venerable saint, accompanied by Mr. Bradford and Mr. Thompson, ascended the pulpit stairs, the congregation, fully sensible that they were looking on one they should see no more in the flesh, burst into tears. Wesley himself was affected; and the feelings of every one were afresh excited when they beheld him who had been "mighty in words" now requiring the aid of a friend to whisper in his ear the heads of his discourse. Such were his infirmities that he was obliged to be supported by the two ministers in the pulpit, and more than once his memory entirely failed him, so that their help was necessary to enable him to continue his discourse.\*

Having traversed the northern counties, Wesley reached

\* *Smith's History of Methodism*, vol. i., p. 598.

Scotland, where he preached in all the principal towns visited by his preachers. He was generally very well received, and fully delivered his soul, employing his remaining strength in faithfully declaring the way of salvation to a people in whom religion seemed almost natural, but whose piety, to his view, was wanting in depth. At Glasgow, by way of exception, "the congregation was miserably small, verifying what I had often heard before, that the Scots dearly love the Word of the Lord—on the Lord's day. If I live to come again, I will take care to spend only the Lord's day at Glasgow." More than once, he exceeded the limits of his strength: at Brechin, for instance, he "was so faint and ill" that he "had to shorten his discourse." The journals prove that, even at this advanced age, he was alive to the beauties of Scotch scenery, and to the grandeur of its mountains.

On his homeward journey, he spent a few days in Newcastle, at the Orphan House, his favourite retreat. "In this, and Kingswood House," he says, "were I to do my own will, I should chose to spend the short remainder of my days. But it cannot be: this is not my rest." In this town, the theatre of such activity and such sufferings in former times, he was received with profound veneration: he preached several times, not only to adults, but to children, and his sermons and visits produced a deep impression upon the minds of the people; the proof of which may be seen in the following account, preserved to us by one of his own preachers. The reminiscences of this last missionary journey are too precious to be omitted.

"He appears very feeble," says Charles Atmore, "and no wonder, he being nearly eighty-eight years of age. His sight has failed so much that he cannot see to give out the hymn; yet his voice is strong, and his spirits remarkably lively. Surely this great and good man is the prodigy of the present age....

"Saturday, May 8th : Mr. Wesley accompanied a small party of us to North Shields, where he preached at noon an excellent sermon from Phil. iii. 7. It was indeed a time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.

"Lord's Day : Mr. W. Thompson occupied the pulpit this morning at nine o'clock, [and preached] from 'Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you.' At 2 p.m., Mr. Wesley went to Byker, and addressed several thousands of people in the open air, from Matt. vii. 24, and at 5 p.m. at the Orphan House, from Eph. ii. 8. The house was much crowded, many hundreds returned, not being able to obtain an entrance.

"Mr. Wesley was highly honoured in his ministry at Newcastle, particularly to one who had been in a state of great despair for many years. As soon as he arrived at the Orphan House, Mr. Wesley inquired after this individual, and I accompanied him in visiting him. As soon as he entered the room, he went up to him, and, as a messenger from God, said, 'Brother Reed, I have a word from God unto Thee ; Jesus Christ maketh thee whole !' He then knelt down to pray, and such a season I have seldom experienced. Hope instantly sprang up, and despair gave place ; and, although he had not been out of his habitation, nor even from his wretched bed, for several years, he went that evening to hear Mr. Wesley preach, while God graciously confirmed the testimony of his servant in restoring him to the 'light of His countenance.' " \*

Returning southwards, Wesley spent an evening at Weardale, where he observes, "The same spirit was still in the congregation that has been for many years." At Stanhope, and again at Durham, he was obliged to preach in the open air. At Monkwearmouth, as elsewhere, he admires and encourages the formation of a Sunday School, "which has already cleared the streets of all the children

\* *The Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, for 1845, pp. 120, 121.

that used to play there on a Sunday from morning to evening." At Whitby, he makes the following note: "It was very providential that part of the adjoining mountain fell down and demolished our old preaching house, with many houses besides; by which means we have one of the most beautiful chapels in Great Britain, finely situated on the steep side of the mountain." This new chapel was too small, however, to contain the people; and their spirit is manifest from the following remark: "In all England I have not seen a more affectionate people than those at Whitby."

On the 28th of June, he is at Hull, and writes in his journal: "This day I enter into my eighty-eighth year. For above eighty-six years I found none of the infirmities of old age; my eyes did not wax dim, neither was my natural strength abated; but last August I found almost a sudden change. My eyes were so dim, that no glasses would help me. My strength, likewise, now quite forsook me, and probably will not return in this world. But I feel no pain, from head to foot; only it seems nature is exhausted; and, humanly speaking, will sink more and more, till

The weary springs of life stand still at last!"

The following day, at Owstone he "passed a comfortable day with many of the preachers. This, which was one of the last Societies in the Circuit, is now become first, in grace as well as number." On Saturday, July 3rd, he reached Epworth, the place of his nativity, and "after preaching in the evening, met the Society, and reminded them of what they were some years ago, and what they are now; scarce retaining the shadow of their former zeal and activity in all the ways of God." On the following day, at the close of the church service, he "began in the market-place to press that awful question, 'How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?' on such a congregation as was never seen at Epworth before."



This last tour terminated at Bristol, where he arrived in August, 1790, in time to preside over the forty-seventh Annual Conference. The delightful impressions produced upon his mind by his visits to the principal Societies were renewed by the tidings of spiritual progress which were brought by the preachers from all quarters. The work was everywhere in full prosperity. Of its numerical strength we shall give a detailed account in the next chapter.

A large number of Wesley's preachers attended the Bristol Conference, and all carried away with them the conviction that they should see his face no more. His physical debility was extreme : nevertheless he continued to preach twice or thrice a day. On the 27th of August, he held a watch-night at Bristol, and in his sermon laboured to counteract the influence of a book from which some of the members had learned the doctrine that the sufferings of this present life have an expiatory value. A few days later, "being the first day of the fair," he "spoke strongly from the words of Solomon, 'Buy the truth, and sell it not.'" On another occasion, he conducted a three hours' service, including the prayers, sermon, and the Lord's Supper, without any assistance, and still was able to preach in the open air in the afternoon of the same day.

At Winchelsea, on the 7th of October, 1790, he preached under a tree from the words, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand : repent, and believe the Gospel." That was his last open-air service, and he then bade adieu to a field of battle on which he had achieved so many victories. But, though his voice was no longer to be lifted up beneath the canopy of heaven, he continued to preach to the last. At Rye, he preached to "a loving, well-united people," and "the word did not fall to the ground ;"—at Colchester, to "a wonderful congregation ; rich and poor, clergy and laity ;"—at Norwich, where "the tide is turned," and he is "become an honourable man ;"—at Yarmouth, where

he says, "after supper a little company went to prayer, and the power of God fell upon us;"—at Lynn, where he arrives "thoroughly chilled from head to foot . . . for which the earnestness of the congregation made me large amends," and where the next day, "all the clergymen in the town, except one who was lame, were present."

Returning to London, he preached twice in one day in the pulpits of the Establishment. "Sunday, 24th: I explained, to a numerous congregation in Spitalfields church, 'the whole armour of God.' St. Paul's, Shadwell, was still more crowded in the afternoon, while I enforced that important truth, 'One thing is needful;' and I hope many, even then, resolved to choose the better part."

"His journals," says an American historian, "containing the most extraordinary record of a human life in the possession of mankind, end on Sunday, the 24th of October, 1790, with a notice of his preaching one entire Sabbath in pulpits of the Establishment, of which he was at once the greatest honour and the greatest victim of the last century."

About the middle of 1790, failing sight compelled him to cease recording his receipts and expenditures in his cash-book. Its last sentence is striking, both by its sentiment and its appearance. "For upwards of eighty-six years I have kept my accounts exactly: I will not attempt it any longer, being satisfied with the continual conviction that I save all I can, and give all I can; that is, all I have." It is scarcely legible, and the error in the number of years is a proof of the decline of his faculties.

Though the record of his labours ends, the labours themselves still go on for some months. He continues to preach in his chapels in London, usually meeting the Society after the sermon, giving them his farewell counsel to "love as brethren, fear God, and honour the king," and then singing with them his accustomed parting hymn. He even prepares to undertake, at the usual time of the year,

another journey to Ireland and Scotland ; his chaise and horses are sent before him to Bristol, and seats engaged for himself and his travelling companion in the Bath coach ; but the energy of his mind can no longer sustain his sinking body, and the design is abandoned.

On the 1st of February, 1791, he writes his last letter to America :

“ To the Rev. Ezekiel Cooper, of Philadelphia.

“ Near London, February 1st, 1791.

“ MY DEAR BROTHER,

“ Those that desire to write or say anything to me have no time to lose ; for time has shaken me by the hand, and death is not far behind. But I have reason to be thankful for the time that is past : I felt few of the infirmities of old age, for fourscore and six years. It was not till a year and a-half ago that my strength and my sight failed. And still I am enabled to scrawl a little, and to creep, though I cannot run. Probably I should not be able to do so much did not many of you assist me by your prayers. I have given a distinct account of the work of God which has been wrought in Britain and Ireland for more than half a century. We want some of you to give us a connected relation of what our Lord has been doing in America, from the time that Richard Boardman accepted the invitation, and left his country to serve you. See that you never give place to one thought of separating from your brethren in Europe. Lose no opportunity of declaring to all men, that the Methodists are one people in all the world, and that it is their full determination so to continue—

Though mountains rise, and oceans roll,  
To sever us in vain.

“ To the care of our common Lord I commit you, and am

“ Your affectionate friend and brother.”

“ Thursday, February 17th, 1791,” says the Rev. Joseph

Benson, "he preached at Lambeth ; but, on his return, seemed much indisposed, and said he had taken cold. The next day, however, he read and wrote as usual, and in the evening, preached at Chelsea, from 'The King's business requireth haste,' although with some difficulty, having a high degree of fever upon him. Indeed, he was obliged to stop once or twice, informing the people that his cold so affected his voice as to prevent his speaking without those necessary pauses. On Saturday he still persevered in his usual employments, though to those about him his complaints seemed evidently increasing. He dined at Islington, and at dinner desired a friend to read to him four chapters out of the Book of Job, namely, from the fourth to the seventh, inclusive. On Sunday he rose early, according to custom ; but, quite unfit for any of his usual Sabbath-day's exercises. At seven o'clock he was obliged to lie down, and slept between three and four hours. When he awoke, he said, 'I have not had such a comfortable sleep this fortnight past.' In the afternoon he lay down again, and slept an hour or two. Afterwards, two of his own discourses on our Lord's Sermon on the Mount were read to him, and in the evening he came down to supper.

"Monday, 21st : he seemed much better, and, though his friends tried to dissuade him from it, he would keep an engagement, made some time before, to dine at Twickenham. In his way thither he called on Lady Mary Fitzgerald. The conversation was truly profitable, and well became a last visit. On Tuesday he went on with his usual work, preached in the evening in the chapel in the City-Road, and seemed much better than he had been for some days. On Wednesday he went to Leatherhead, and preached to a small company on, 'Seek ye the Lord while He may be found ; call ye upon Him while He is near.' This proved to be his last sermon. Here ended the public labours of this great minister of Jesus Christ."

"On that day," (Wed. 23rd,) says the historian whom we have frequently quoted before, "fell from his dying grasp a trumpet of the truth, which had sounded the everlasting Gospel oftener and more effectually than that of any other man for sixteen hundred years... Whitefield preached eighteen thousand sermons, more than ten a week for his thirty-four years of ministerial life. Wesley preached forty-two thousand four hundred, after his return from Georgia, more than fifteen a week."

... "On Saturday, the 26th, he wrote his final letter. It was addressed to Wilberforce, and was an exhortation to perseverance in his Parliamentary labours against the African slave-trade. By his 'Thoughts upon Slavery,' he had pledged himself to that great reform at its beginning under Clarkson and Sharp." The letter is too interesting and does too much honour to both these great men to be omitted.

"London, February 26th, 1791.

"DEAR SIR,

"Unless the Divine power has raised you up to be as *Athanasius contra mundum*,\* I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise in opposing that execrable villany, which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature. Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But, 'if God be for you, who can be against you?' Are all of them together stronger than God? O, 'be not weary in well doing!' Go on, in the name of God and in the power of His might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it.

"Reading this morning a tract, wrote by a poor African, I was particularly struck by that circumstance,—that a man who has a black skin, being wronged or outraged by

\* "*Athanasius against the world.*"

a white man, can have no redress ; it being a law in all our colonies, that the oath of a black against a white goes for nothing. What villany is this !

“That He who has guided you from your youth up, may continue to strengthen you in this and all things, is the prayer of,

“ Dear Sir,  
“ Your affectionate servant,  
“ JOHN WESLEY.”

The closing scenes of Wesley's life are thus described by the Rev. Joseph Benson :

“Sunday morning (February 27th) he seemed much better, got up and took a cup of tea. Sitting in his chair, he looked quite cheerful, and repeated the latter part of the verse, in his brother Charles's Scripture Hymns, on ‘Forsake me not when my strength faileth,’ namely :—

‘Till glad I lay this body down,  
Thy servant, Lord, attend ;  
And, O ! my life of mercy crown  
With a triumphant end.’

Soon after, in a most emphatical manner, he said, ‘Our friend Lazarus sleepeth.’ Exerting himself to converse with some friends, he was soon fatigued, and obliged to lie down. After lying quiet some time, he looked up, and said, ‘Speak to me ; I cannot speak.’ On which, one of the company said, ‘Shall we pray with you, Sir ?’ He earnestly replied, ‘Yes.’ And while they prayed, his whole soul seemed engaged with God for an answer, and his hearty Amen showed that he perfectly understood what was said. About half an hour after, he said, ‘There is no need of more : when at Bristol my words were,

‘ I the chief of sinners am,  
But Jesus died for me.’ ”\*

\* At the Bristol Conference, in 1783, Mr. Wesley was taken very ill : neither he nor his friends thought he could recover. From the

"One said, 'Is this the present language of your heart? And do you now feel as you did then?' He replied, 'Yes.' When the same person repeated,

'Bold I approach the' eternal throne,  
And claim the crown through Christ my own ;'

and added, 'Tis enough ; He, our precious Emmanuel, has purchased, has promised all ;' he earnestly replied, 'He is all ! He is all !' After this the fever was very high, and, at times, affected his recollection ; but even then, though his head was subject to a temporary derangement, his heart seemed wholly engaged in his Master's work. In the evening he got up again ; and, while sitting in his chair, he said, 'How necessary it is for every one to be on the right foundation !

'I the chief of sinners am,  
But Jesus died for me.'

"Monday, 28th : his weakness increased. He slept most of the day, and spoke but little ; yet that little testified how much his whole heart was taken up in the care of the Societies, the glory of God, and the promotion of the things pertaining to that kingdom to which he was hastening. Once he said, in a low but distinct manner, 'There is no way into the holiest but by the blood of Jesus.' He afterwards inquired what the words were from which he had preached a little before at Hampstead. Being told

nature of his complaint, he supposed a spasm would seize his stomach, and probably occasion sudden death. Under these views of his situation, he said to Mr. Bradford, "I have been reflecting on my past life : I have been wandering up and down between fifty and sixty years, endeavouring, in my poor way, to do a little good to my fellow-creatures : and now it is probable that there are but a few steps between me and death ; and what have I to trust to for salvation ? I can see nothing which I have done or suffered that will bear looking at. I have no other plea than this :

'I the chief of sinners am,  
But Jesus died for me.'

they were these, 'Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich;' he replied, 'That is the foundation, the only foundation: there is no other.' This day, Dr. Whitehead desired he might be asked if he would have any other physician called in to attend him; but this he absolutely refused. It is remarkable that he suffered very little pain, never complaining of any during his illness, but once of a pain in his left breast. This was a restless night.

"Tuesday morning: he sang two verses of a hymn: then, lying still, as if to recover strength, he called for pen and ink; but when they were brought, he could not write. A person said, 'Let me write for you, Sir: tell me what you would say.' He replied, 'Nothing, but that God is with us.' In the forenoon he said, 'I will get up.' While they were preparing his clothes, he broke out in a manner which, considering his extreme weakness, astonished all present, in singing,

'I'll praise my Maker while I've breath;  
And when my voice is lost in death,  
Praise shall employ my nobler powers:  
My days of praise shall ne'er be past,  
While life, and thought, and being last,  
Or immortality endures.'

"Having got him into his chair, they observed him change for death. But he, regardless of his dying body, said, with a weak voice, 'Lord, Thou givest strength to those that can speak, and to those who cannot. Speak, Lord, to all our hearts, and let them know that Thou loosest tongues.' He then sung,

'To Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,  
Who sweetly all agree,——'

Here his voice failed. After gasping for breath, he said, 'Now we have done all.' He was then laid in the bed



from which he rose no more. After resting a little, he called to those who were with him to 'pray and praise.' They kneeled down, and the room seemed to be filled with the Divine presence. A little after, he said, 'Let me be buried in nothing but what is woollen, and let my corpse be carried into the chapel.' Then, as if he had done with all below, he again begged they would pray and praise. Several friends that were in the house being called up, they all kneeled down again to prayer, at which time his fervour of spirit was manifest to every one present. But, in particular parts of the prayer, his whole soul seemed to be engaged in a manner which evidently showed how ardently he longed for the full accomplishment of their united desires. And when one of the preachers was praying in a very expressive manner, that if God were about to take away their father to his eternal rest, He would be pleased to continue and increase His blessing upon the doctrine and discipline which He had long made His servant the means of propagating and establishing in the world, such a degree of fervour accompanied his loud 'Amen,' as was every way expressive of his soul's being engaged in the answer of the petitions. On rising from their knees, he took hold of all their hands, and, with the utmost placidness, saluted them and said, 'Farewell, farewell.'

"A little after, a person coming in, he strove to speak, but could not. Finding they could not understand him, he paused a little, and then, with all the remaining strength he had, cried out, 'The best of all is, God is with us;' and soon after, lifting up his dying arm in token of victory, and raising his feeble voice with a holy triumph not to be expressed, he again repeated the heart-reviving words, 'The best of all is, God is with us.' Being told that his brother's widow was come, he said, 'He giveth his servants rest.' He thanked her, as she

pressed his hand, and affectionately endeavoured to kiss her. On his lips being wetted, he said, 'We thank Thee, O Lord, for these and all Thy mercies : bless the Church and King, and grant us truth and peace, through Jesus Christ our Lord, for ever and ever !' At another time, he said, 'He causeth His servants to lie down in peace.' Then, pausing a little, he cried, 'The clouds drop fatness !' and soon after, 'The Lord is with us ; the God of Jacob is our refuge.' He then called those present to prayer, and, though he was greatly exhausted, he appeared still more fervent in spirit. These exertions were, however, too much for his feeble frame ; and most of the night following, though he often attempted to repeat the Psalm before mentioned, he could only utter, 'I'll praise—I'll praise !'

"On Wednesday morning, the closing scene drew near. Mr. Bradford, his faithful friend, prayed with him, and the last word he was heard to articulate was, 'Farewell.' A few minutes before ten, while several of his friends were kneeling around his bed, without a lingering groan, this man of God, this beloved Pastor of thousands, entered into the joy of his Lord."

His death took place on the 2nd of March, 1791, at a little before ten in the morning.

Mrs. Hester Ann Rogers, who was present throughout the last scene, writes, "The solemnity of the dying hour of that great and good man, I believe will ever be written on my heart. A cloud of the Divine presence rested on all ; and while he could hardly be said to be an inhabitant of earth, being now speechless, and his eyes fixed, victory and glory were written on his countenance, and quivering, as it were, on his dying lips. No language can paint what appeared in that face ! The more we gazed upon it, the more we saw of heaven unspeakable."

He had requested in his will that his funeral should be celebrated without ceremony ; no hearse, no coach, no

escutcheon ; no pomp, except the tears of those who loved him, and were following him to heaven. These requests were strictly observed by his executors.

The day before his burial, his corpse was placed in the City-Road chapel, dressed in his gown, cassock, and band. His countenance is described as singularly placid, wearing a "heavenly smile, a beauty which was admired by all who saw it." Multitudes flocked to see for the last time his venerable features, and it was deemed necessary to inter him before six o'clock in the morning, in order to prevent accidents from the crowd. Many spectators, however, were present ; and when the preacher who read the burial service reached the passage, "Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God to take unto Himself the soul of our brother," and substituted the word *father*, the people were so deeply affected that from silent tears they broke out into loud weeping.

Wesley's remains were deposited in a vault which he had had prepared in the cemetery adjoining City-Road chapel. There they repose, awaiting the resurrection of the just.

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## CHAPTER V.

### *WESLEY'S CHARACTER.*

WESLEY's character might well demand a more profound and detailed examination than we can here attempt. We must content ourselves with a brief outline of its principal features, regarding him as a man, a preacher, a writer, and an administrator.

In Wesley, the man is inseparable from the Christian. His whole life is only the visible embodiment of his faith

and his Christian experience, and the external was in perfect harmony with the internal. It was that long and painful course of preparation through which he was called to pass, and which was prolonged through the whole period of youth, that made him what he was. A Christian life born amid such conflicts could not but be profound; a character formed in such a school could not but be energetic in the highest degree. Wesley was, in fact, eminent no less as a man than as a Christian. It only needs to study the sources of his life, in order to be convinced of that. Few men have lived so much in public. His journals and his correspondence afford abundant evidence of his manner of life, and enable us to follow his course from day to day. We find him perfectly frank in his dealings with himself as well as others. There is nothing to indicate the mere posture-master, who attitudinizes in the presence of the public. His transparent sincerity sometimes amounts to simplicity. He takes the public into his confidence, and relates incidents which an enemy might turn into a weapon against himself. He is absolutely wanting in that address by which some men know how to display their good qualities to the best advantage.

This perfect sincerity was displayed in the ardour and disinterestedness of his pursuit of truth. Warped by no influence of school or party, he interrogates facts simply in order that he may form his judgment by them. If he sometimes seems too uncritical in his selection of the facts by which he judges, if he too readily accepts the evidence of marvellous stories, let us remember that he lived in an age when such a man as Dr. Johnson believed in ghosts, and such a country as Scotland burned witches. Let us not forget, moreover, that the great movement of the eighteenth century could hardly fail to give birth to exceptional circumstances, such as could not then be coolly judged of, and cannot now be easily explained away.

He records such facts in his journals generally without the slightest comment : and in this he gives no proof of the credulity with which he has been charged, but simply shows his regard for facts, and confesses that he has not yet extracted all its secrets from the invisible world. And further, it would be an injustice to Wesley to hold him responsible for any errors which may be discovered in the early period of his religious career, when he was not yet freed from the influence of the mystics.

This injustice has been committed by M. Taine and M. De Witt : they regard him from two widely-different stand-points, but they agree in reproaching him with having occasionally consulted the lot. But, besides that the example of the apostles authorizes the use of the lot in certain extraordinary cases, I am not aware that Wesley once had recourse to it after he had reached the maturity of his religious life. And this remark applies to most of the instances of so-called enthusiasm with which he has been charged. Their date is a sufficient explanation.

Another accusation has been launched against him, which, if proved, would be a much more serious affair. According to Southey, one of Wesley's ruling motives was ambition.\* His whole existence appears to us to be a complete refutation of this statement. A rare and strange ambition that, truly, which prompts a man to renounce his most favourite tastes and pursuits, and turn field-preacher to the coarsest and most ungovernable rabble that the world ever saw ! To expect celebrity from such a fickle-minded mob, were as mere madness as it would be to write one's name upon

\* Southey's views on this point were very materially modified in his later days. In a letter to his publisher, dated 17th August, 1835, he says : " Mr. Alexander Knox has convinced me that I was mistaken in supposing ambition entered largely into Mr. Wesley's actuating impulses." Southey intended to make such alterations in his book as this statement required. Unfortunately, his death prevented this intention from being carried out.

the sands swept by the whirlwind in order to transmit it to posterity. True, Wesley wielded a vast sway over his Societies and their preachers; but, on the one hand, such a superintendence was absolutely necessary, if the heterogeneous elements he had collected were not to be utterly dissolved; and, on the other, it must be remembered that, though he retained the supreme control over his own work, he very early shared the responsibility with the Conference, and that more than once he endeavoured to devolve on others a burden which he found so oppressive.

This leads us to the observation that one of Wesley's most marked features was that perfect faith in the directions of Providence which we have so frequently met with in the course of his life, and which ill assorts with the theory of ambitious designs.

Besides, it is morally impossible for any one who has intimately studied his deep piety, to attribute to Wesley ambitious and selfish aims. If his whole outward life is a protest against such an imputation, his inward piety bears still stronger testimony. He possessed an humble and yet confident trust in the power of Divine grace, and on that alone did he base his expectations of success. His works and writings breathe the fragrant odour of vital godliness: it is evident that he had completely thrown off the trammels of that mysticism which he had learned at Oxford, and which, if indulged in, would have been his ruin. Wesley was deeply indebted to the Moravians: not only had their influence brought about the decisive crisis of his spiritual history, but it had led him to assert strongly the reality of the internal operations of the Spirit of God.

Many facts related in this volume show Wesley to have been a man of prayer. In this exercise he was mighty even to daring: he had continual recourse to it, and that in circumstances in which others would hardly have ventured

to do so. An account of the temporal and spiritual deliverances which Wesley notes in his journals as the result of prayer would be a most interesting record. It was more frequently under his prayers even than under his sermons that sinners were convinced of sin and obtained peace.

Wesley's piety was neither narrow nor intolerant. If it sometimes happens in the course of a polemical discussion that he is carried away by the ardour of the combat, he fully redeems such momentary failings by the largeness of his ideas and the catholic sentiments of his whole life. His friendship with Whitefield continued, as we have seen, unbroken by the doctrinal controversies which arose between them. His sermon, "On a Catholic Spirit," shows that he was worthy to rank among the forerunners of the Evangelical Alliance. His heart was so large that he could not confine his sympathies within the limits of sect or party. Wherever he recognized the true spirit of Christianity, he did homage to it, however it might be alloyed by the admixture of error and infirmity. His liberality was so great that he edited for the use of his Societies several works whose authors belonged to the Romish communion. He published also, in the pages of the Magazine and elsewhere, biographical notices of eminent Catholic saints, such as Madame Guyon, the Marquis de Renty, Gregory Lopez, and others. This catholicity of spirit was often misunderstood by many sincere Christians, but it was one of those points on which he laid the greatest stress. The only limit he placed to freedom of thought among his Societies, was the respect due to the opinions of others. His sentiments on this head he explains in the following manner : "I have no more right to object to a man because he holds an opinion different from mine, than I have a right to separate from a man because he wears a wig, while I wear none. But if he happen to take off

his wig, and shake the powder in my eyes, I shall consider it my duty to run away from him as soon as possible."

While Wesley's religious character was such as to gain the respect of all, it may be added that his natural and acquired abilities clothed it with an undefinable charm. The internal peace he enjoyed seemed to shine forth in an amiability and serenity of disposition which won all hearts. He carried into all his social intercourse so much ease and grace, he was so full of affection and cordiality, that the charm of his conversation was irresistible, and a brief interview was often enough to change his bitterest opponents into friends. Owing to his vast intellectual culture, together with his rare intelligence and incomparable fluency of expression, his society was courted by men of fortune and talents, and they esteemed it an honour to invite him to their tables : but he was not less at home with the poor country people among whom he was a frequent guest, forgetting himself, and enabling them to forget, the difference in their education. His correspondence, from which we have only been able to make brief extracts, places him in an amiable and friendly light, endowed with an exquisite and sympathetic sensibility.

Wesley's character, so interesting in private life, is only fully unfolded, however, in the vast theatre of his public activity, where it received its full development. Having studied the man, we must now contemplate the popular preacher. To speak the truth, his power resided chiefly in his preaching : by it he acted upon the masses, and by it he scattered broadcast over the face of the earth those imperishable seeds which contained the germs of such a future. In presence of the almost fabulous success that crowned his labours, a question occurs which seems at first sight an insoluble enigma. How did he, the Oxford graduate, who was all his life long a devoted student of the classical authors, and who read on horseback the



original of Homer and Virgil, how did he become the street-preacher, the popular orator of the masses? Thirst for celebrity is no explanation, as we have already seen. Love for souls, that pure and noble passion enkindled in the heart by the love of God, alone accounts for this otherwise incomprehensible phenomenon. This alone can explain, also, the indefatigable perseverance which prolonged such an apostleship beyond the bounds of half a century.

The conflicts of fifty years reveal great qualities in Wesley, of which a military commander might well have been proud. To speak the truth, the Anglo-Saxon race, with those practical qualities which constitute its distinguishing feature, never had a better representative than he. He knew how to yoke into the service of his religious principles the strong will and the unconquerable tenacity which have brought such success to English colonies. He vanquished the ill-will of the people by a perseverance which stood the test of all kinds of opposition.

What gave his preaching so much of originality was his perfect frankness: it may be truly said of Wesley that he "spoke as one having authority." He never flatters his audience: sometimes, indeed, as he tells us himself, he "spoke strong, rough words:" he knows nothing of the art of disguising his thoughts, in order to render them more acceptable. His concise and expressive language aims directly at its object, and says exactly what he means. Many instances have been given of the almost magical effect produced on the minds of the people by his incisive utterance. Still more effectually, perhaps, did he wield this power over individuals. When he fixed his gaze on one of his hearers, it was a very rare thing if the heart did not quail beneath his glance. Sometimes a man would enter his congregation with his hat on his head, fully determined to put him to silence, but his countenance would change and his cheek pale as he encountered the

keen eye that seemed to pierce to the depths of his being. We must not, however, suppose that this influence of Wesley upon the masses in any degree resembled insolence or haughtiness. His authority was of a purely moral kind, and was attained through the slow but unerring operation of Christian faith and zeal.

It must be added that, in many respects, Wesley was admirably qualified for his mission as a popular preacher. Besides that eagle glance and that flowing and flexible voice, he possessed qualities of mind most highly valued by the people, viz., clearness and precision. None knew better than he did how to familiarize the loftiest truths to the lowliest minds. None knew better how to employ a sprightly repartee or a happy expression, so that when a long harangue would have failed in its object, the "witty proverb" penetrated like the point of a sword.

But let us endeavour to form a just idea of Wesley's oratorical ability. In the open street as in the pulpit of the University of Oxford, the style of this great preacher is simple and level to the understanding of every individual: his reasoning is logical and nervous; and, having once admitted his premises, you are carried away in spite of yourself, and compelled to accept the consequences he deduces from them. His argumentation flows in a full stream, but it is not circuitous, and does not overflow its proper channels. It is not overloaded with the vain and frivolous ornaments, by the use of which some seek to veil the poverty of their thoughts, nor with those tangled digressions which hide from the hearer the principal aim of the discourse. His sole business is to produce conviction: hence he puts himself face to face with his opponent, and never neglects to answer his objections, generally showing how contrary they are to common sense. His aim is direct: he despises circumlocution, and never mistakes rhetorical artifice for argument.

Though a profound logician, Wesley is far from being a wearisome dogmatist. Let any one be at the pains to compare him with Tillotson or Barrow, and he will understand the vast progress preaching has made through his influence, and the great revolution he has effected in a department that had remained stationary since the sixteenth century. He does not, like them, conduct an argument for argument's sake, straining himself to prove, by a grand array of syllogisms, some commonplace of doctrine or morality which nobody dreams of disputing. He daringly confronts those subjects which are the most strongly controverted, and at the same time, in his view, the most fundamental to Christianity. The subjects of which he treats are among the loftiest and gravest that can be brought into the Christian pulpit; yet they are stated with so much frankness, resolved with such admirable ease into their simplest forms, expounded and discussed with such marvellous lucidity, that the hearer, however uncultivated, is captivated and subdued, and with difficulty withstands the running fire of such powerful and burning eloquence. The rhetorical style of Tillotson and his imitators resembles those heavy batteries which, planted on the heights of some lofty citadel, await the approach of the enemy, and only prove their efficacy when he complacently advances within the range of their fire. Wesley, on the other hand, resembles the light artillery composed of field-pieces, which follow the enemy to his farthest entrenchments. His sermons are generally short : his sprightly and compact diction always proceeds straight forward : his vivid thoughts come clearly before the eye of the mind, and frequently take the form of an aphorism which engraves itself upon the memory of the hearer.

Wesley has the great merit of having popularized, and, if I may venture to say so, humanized that austere divinity formerly known only to the initiated, and denominated

logic. He had a real respect for the people, which is utterly wanting to those preachers who talk to them as if they were children, giving them reasons that they do not want, or seeking to create a merely morbid sensibility on which no durable structure can be reared. The people insensibly rose to Wesley's level, because he knew how to come down to theirs.

As an orator, Wesley was certainly inferior to Whitefield. But, besides this logical faculty of which we have just been speaking, he possessed an incisiveness of speech which was lacking in his friend, so that he sometimes carried conviction to hearts that had remained unmoved by the appeals of his eloquent friend. John Nelson tells us that he had often listened to Whitefield's sermons, and had been charmed by them, as by strains of incomparable music: he admired the preaching and loved the preacher, but no more. Wesley's preaching produced a totally different effect. Let us hear the testimony of this eye-witness. "As soon as he had mounted the platform," he says, "he stroked back his long hair, and turned toward the spot where I stood: I thought he fixed his eyes upon me. This single look filled me with inexpressible anguish: before he opened his mouth, my heart beat like the pendulum of a clock, and when he spoke, I thought his whole discourse was aimed at me."

It was, in fact, a striking characteristic of Wesley's preaching that his arguments were constantly interrupted by appeals to the conscience and the heart. Scarcely has he by thorough discussion discovered and dislodged a stone from the quarry of truth, but as a wise master-builder he is already working it into its place in the spiritual edifice. While his contemporaries resemble a body of antiquarians, painfully occupied in collecting a store of rusty armour wherewith to establish a museum, Wesley no sooner lights upon these disused weapons, but he

remodels them for present use and turns them against the foe. He never forgets that he has to do with souls whom he must save from the wrath to come. When he argues, it is not to exhibit the frivolous spectacle of a brilliant theological or philosophical tournament: it is to establish upon immovable foundations the structure he wishes to build. His proofs are more commonly biblical than philosophical, and are addressed to the conscience rather than to the intellect alone.

The applications of Wesley's sermons are never indirect, but always straightforward and aggressive. By a frequent and felicitous use of the second person singular, which, as is well known, is in English reserved for biblical and poetical language, and is then always employed with the finest effect, he throws into his appeals a forcefulness which no translation can reproduce. This habit, together with that of the employment of a great number of scriptural expressions, not formally cited but inwrought into the texture of his periods, communicates to his sermons an archaic tinge, as well as a salient energy, which often recall the preaching of the prophets.

The success of Wesley's preaching gives us a lofty idea of the character of the Anglo-Saxon race, to whose moral renovation he devoted his life. The nation must have retained great and noble instincts in the depths of its moral being, otherwise such strong meat would never have suited it, and the success of such preaching would never have amounted to more than a momentary enthusiasm. A people capable of appreciating such sermons as these, and that at the very moment of their spiritual awakening, must have been a great one, whose future was in their own hands. Compare them with another at the same epoch, crowding around those worldly abbots who were such favourites at Versailles, and one may well ask where is the life, the vigour, the future, in a word, of such a people as

this? The one nation, polite and amiable, will hear no Gospel except that of the Vicar of Savoy, and, without suspecting it, is on the verge of a bloody revolution: the other, rude and coarse, receives the teachings of Wesley and his coadjutors, and gradually rises in the scale of being till it attains real greatness, and is ready for the work to which God, in the order of His providence, has called it.

Wesley influenced the age in which he lived not only by his tongue, but by his pen. More than any of his contemporaries, he understood the importance of popular literature, and he was one of the pioneers of those great societies which have flooded the world with religious publications in the present day. Notwithstanding his incessant missionary labours, he found time to publish about two hundred volumes, translated or abridged by himself, and treating of theology, biography, history, philosophy, poetry, grammar, medicine, etc., and always from a popular point of view. Large editions were sold at the lowest prices, and obtained an extensive circulation, through the assistance of his preachers, whose influence contributed greatly to the formation of a taste for reading among his Societies.

In his original productions, of which the principal are his "Sermons," "Journals," "Notes on the New Testament," "Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion," and his "Treatise on Original Sin," Wesley displays all the qualities of a superior intellect: his style is pronounced by competent judges to be excellent, being polished and yet powerful. Deeply devoted to the study of the ancient classical writings, and at the same time familiar with the principal modern languages, he acquired, in the course of his wide reading, a wealth of information and of thought which renders his writings interesting to the educated as well as instructive to the illiterate.

While we find everywhere in his works traces of his classical lore, and numerous reminiscences of his Oxford training, there is no indication of narrowness or pedantry. He writes not for the sake of writing, but in order to convince : he appears to care little for fine composition, as if wholly absorbed by the desire to be understood of all. He is neither a rhetorician nor a literary artist : he is a soldier of Christ, who never loses sight of his flag. His style, like his thought, is energetic and compact : the one suits the other like a well-shaped garment, following every movement and rendering every modification of the form with scrupulous fidelity.

It is in argumentation that Wesley succeeds best. When we read his smaller polemical pieces, or even his more extended writings, such as his refutation of Dr. Taylor, of Norwich, we are struck with the variety and vigour of his talents as a controversialist. Of a logical rather than a philosophical turn of mind, he never loses himself in the regions of abstract metaphysics : he confines himself to safer and more accessible ground, and the blows he deals out to his adversaries rarely miss their aim. Whether he annihilates the arguments of his antagonists by appeals to common sense or draws out against them weapons from the armoury of Scripture, whether he speaks the language of rigid reason or has recourse to playful irony, we feel that he is conscious of his strength, and that he will probably succeed in gaining over the reader to his side.

We shall not enlarge upon Wesley's qualities as the founder and organizer of a system, although in this sphere he presents himself as a man of first-rate ability. All impartial writers who have studied closely the vast ecclesiastical system which bears the marks of his genius, have admired its well-planned organization. Buckle, the historian of English civilization, calls Wesley "the first of

theological statesmen." The illustrious Macaulay goes further still : " Wesley," he says, " conducted one of the most wonderful moral revolutions the world ever saw : his eloquence and his piercing logic would have made him an eminent literary man ; and his genius for government was not inferior to Richelieu's."

Viewed as a whole, Wesley's character appears to us remarkably complete. He unites qualities which most commonly seem to exclude one another, but which in him are moulded into a harmonious whole. His life, like his mind, is crowded with multifarious occupations : one would say that several distinct personalities and existences must have been blended together to constitute this one personality and this one existence. His manifold cares and labours do not oppress him ; he bears the burden without weariness, even to extreme old age. Is not this marvellous adaptation of the workman to the work due to a special Providence ? And does it not clearly manifest Wesley to have been one of those men whom God Himself raises up and endows with extraordinary qualifications in order that they may accomplish an extraordinary mission ?

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## CHAPTER VI.

*WESLEY'S WORK AND ITS RESULTS.*

WESLEY's work had a two-fold result, the one direct and leading to the formation of a vast ecclesiastical system, the other more general and embracing the whole nation. It remains that we briefly describe this two-fold influence.

Methodism was the special work of Wesley's life : by its theology and its organization it satisfied the religious necessities created by the Revival.

Its theology was, in all essential features, that of the English Reformation, as summed up in the Thirty-Nine Articles. Fully harmonising with all other Evangelical Churches in the fundamental doctrines of the Trinity, the Divinity of the Son and of the Spirit, the Incarnation of the Son, and the mediatorial character of His work, Wesley was equally explicit respecting the doctrines of the Fall, and of Original Sin, and is wronged by those who accuse him of semi-Pelagianism. To be convinced of this, it is only necessary to read his refutation of the views of Dr. Taylor, of Norwich.

On the other hand, Wesley totally rejects the Calvinist doctrine of the limited extent of redemption. Believing the Scriptures to teach that Christ died for all, he always affirmed that "all may recover through the second Adam whatsoever they have lost through the first, and that no child of man perishes except by his own fault." Rigid Calvinism, in Wesley's eyes, too often leads on to the deplorable abyss of Antinomianism, and he could, therefore, make no compromise with it. He upheld the responsibility

of man in reference to his own salvation, without in any degree weakening the doctrines of grace, and thus rendered an immense service to the Revival. The evangelical theology of our times is greatly indebted to his teachings, to which, indeed, it is constantly approximating.

The doctrines concerning the attainment of salvation occupy the foremost place in Wesley's theology. "Our chief doctrines," he says, "which include all others, are repentance, faith, and holiness. The first of these we consider as the way to religion, the second as the gate, the third, religion itself." The Methodists attach special importance to these vital doctrines, which have become the pivots of their theology. True, they have introduced no new ideas upon these subjects, but they have embodied them in more precise and practical formularies, and by bringing them down to the level of the humblest intelligence, have opened up the way to the consciences of men.

Repentance retains, in Wesley's view, its profound significance and lofty character. It is not a vain formality, but a deep sorrow for having offended God, manifesting itself not in tears only but in "fruits meet for repentance."

Faith is, in Wesley's system as in St. Paul's, the sole means of obtaining salvation. "It is not only," says he, "an entire assent to Christ's Gospel, it is a complete repose in the blood of Christ, a trust in the merits of His life, death, and resurrection; a coming to Him as our expiatory Sacrifice and our Life, who gave Himself for us, and lives in us."

Everything in salvation—justification, regeneration, sanctification—is obtained by faith. Justification is simply the pardon of our sins: it completely changes a sinner's relationship to God. In regeneration, the Holy Spirit renews his very nature, changes his heart, and admits him

into the family of God by the bestowment of the "Spirit of adoption." Sanctification is the work of purification begun in the soul at the moment of regeneration. "Sanctification," he says, "begins when we begin to believe, and in proportion as our faith increases, our holiness increases also."

Wesley was early convinced by the study of the Scriptures that this work of inward purification and conquest over sin is fully accomplished in this life, and this was the doctrine which he preached under the Scriptural names of entire sanctification and Christian perfection. He describes this great blessing in the following terms: "It is to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength; which implies that no evil disposition, none contrary to love, remains in the soul, and that every thought, word, and action is governed by pure love." The Christian perfection, then, to be realized in this life, is the perfection of love: Christians who by faith attain this happy state, are "not thereby exempt from ignorance and error. We have no more right to expect that a man should be infallible, than that he should be omniscient. None will be freed from infirmities and temptations till his spirit returns to God."

Another doctrine which occupies an important place in Wesley's theology is that of the Witness of the Spirit. He defines it as "an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God directly witnesses to my spirit that I am a child of God; that Jesus Christ hath loved me, and given Himself for me; and that all my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God."

This witness of the Spirit was not in Wesley's view the unconditional assurance of final salvation. He rejected the Calvinist doctrine of final perseverance as he rejected unconditional predestination, and to this he was compelled by a process of rigorous logic: asserting the freedom and responsibility of man at the outset of his religious life, he

could not afterwards despoil it of these perilous prerogatives. The possibility of apostasy, so clearly taught in the Scriptures, was also a warning to all.

Such is, in its main features, the theology which formed the basis of Wesley's work. Clear, simple, and practical, it contained within itself all the elements of success. Expounded in Wesley's terse and transparent style, and propagated by his admirable sermons, it became the grand subject of his Preachers' study, and the theme of their ministrations, and thus afforded his Societies solid nutriment. The best proof of its efficacy is to be found in the great religious movement which we have traced in this book, and which may be said to be the result of the faithful preaching of those Evangelical doctrines which Wesley had resuscitated.

In giving Methodism a theology which simply re-affirmed the great doctrines of experimental Christianity, Wesley laid a broad and stable foundation for the edifice he reared upon it. We have now to contemplate the edifice itself, i.e., the organization of Methodism, of which it will suffice to give such a general view as will show the results of the growth of half a century.

The basis of this organization is the Society, properly so called, comprising the body of believers who, in each locality, embrace the principles of Methodism. The sole condition of membership in this Society was "a desire to flee from the wrath to come," requiring adhesion to no doctrinal formularies whatsoever; and in order to continuance in it, it was necessary to evidence that desire by Christian conduct, and to maintain Christian communion by attendance at the class-meeting.

The class-meeting, which is the very key-stone of Methodism, is an excellent method of exercising the 'cure of souls,' at the same time that it is a realization in the bosom of the Church of that fraternal fellowship so well understood in the apostolic age, and so deplorably neglected

in our own. A class is usually composed of about twelve persons, who are placed under the guidance of a leader, selected on account of his Christian experience and judgment. His business is to watch over the spiritual state of those committed to his care, not only by meeting them weekly to inquire how their souls prosper, but also by visiting them at their own homes. The class-meeting is thus, it will be seen, the nucleus of the Church; and, owing to its simple organization, it has often of itself supplied the place of other ordinances. By dividing pastoral labour, it has rendered it easier, and at the same time made the exercise of discipline more thorough.

By means of these weekly meetings an easy method was also provided of raising the necessary funds for the maintenance of the work; and the leader, whose business it was to give an account of the religious state of the members to the preachers, also gave an account of their moneys to the local stewards. Thus the fiscal system was extremely simple, and yet generally efficacious.

Another custom which Wesley adopted was borrowed from the ancient Churches. Each member of Society received periodically a ticket, inscribed with his own name and that of the preacher from whom he received it. This quarterly ticket served as a token of membership, and was to be presented at certain meetings of the Church in order to admission.

Besides the class-meeting proper, the Societies had other meetings, as the band-meetings, in which a more intimate association of the members was encouraged, but which, being optional, gradually fell into desuetude; the love-feasts, in which all the classes of a given Society met together to break bread, according to the custom of the primitive Church, and held free conference on their Christian experience; the watch-nights, meetings for spiritual edification, which were protracted till midnight, and which were at first held monthly, about the time of the full

moon, but now are only celebrated on the last day of the year, for the purpose of spending in prayer the hour that marks the close of the old year and the beginning of the new ; the renewal of the covenant, a special service held the first Sunday in the year, in which the members devote themselves afresh to God by a solemn vow.

The administration of the Lord's Supper to the Societies was as yet rare, owing to the small number of ordained ministers that laboured among them ; but this anomaly did not long exist, and the Societies soon attained the full emancipation for which their Founder had prepared them.

On the whole, we have here a remarkable assemblage of means of grace, all tending powerfully to develop the spiritual life of the members, and to establish on sure foundations the unity of the Societies. Quarterly meetings of the office-bearers of the Church were gradually established, at which the spiritual and material interests of the work of God were discussed.

Besides the class-leaders there were other office-bearers of various kinds. The trustees were those who undertook the management of the trust-estates. The stewards received the various moneys contributed by the Societies, and disbursed them according to their needs : their office in some degree resembles that of the deacons in other Churches. The local-preachers were pious laymen who, possessing the gift of utterance, consented to devote their Sabbaths, and often their week-nights, to the work of the Gospel, without any recompense for their services. These useful labourers have multiplied in number, and become important auxiliaries, by whose aid Methodism is enabled with moderate resources to extend its evangelistic labours over a large field with a facility that other Churches may well envy.

We have narrated at some length the humble origin of

the itinerant ministry, that institution which, more than any other, has won for Methodism its position in the present day. It occupies a capital place in its organization, and of itself would suffice to prove the original and yet Providential character of the movement. These irregular clergy whom Wesley called into existence by following the directions of Providence, sprang from the people, and therefore understood the wants of the people, and were in turn understood by them. This valiant militia, which was reckoned by hundreds at the time of Wesley's death, was constantly in motion : Wesley made intinerancy the very law of its existence, and by this means was enabled, not only to keep up its missionary zeal, but to multiply its operations, and to achieve great results with a small number of men. He had divided Great Britain into Circuits, so called because the preachers in charge of them were expected to visit successively the principal localities contained within their boundaries : their sojourn in each Circuit, also, was never to exceed three years, and at each Conference they might be called upon to change their spheres of labour. A ministry so well disciplined, and possessing the excellent spirit which Wesley knew how to inspire into his agents, could not but wield immense power ; and its success ought not to surprise us.

During Wesley's life, he was himself the living bond of this extensive organization. At his death the Annual Conference inherited that position, and became the supreme court in which the most important interests of the Societies were debated. Other modifications, chiefly in matters of detail, arose in the course of time : these it is not our business to discuss : suffice it to say that such changes have not in any degree cramped, but rather tended to consolidate, the work of Wesley's life.

This organization has proved its strength by a duration of more than a century, during which period it has followed

the law of an ever-widening progression. It has commanded the admiration of all those who have closely studied the subject. While some of its features, as, for instance, those derived from Wesley's ecclesiastical position, have not escaped criticism, all impartial judges are compelled to admit that, as a whole, it is admirably adapted to the ends for which it was designed.

"The peculiarity of Methodism," says M. Cucheval-Clarigny, "and that which has made it so successful, is that it never leaves the Christian to himself, but continually supplies him with spiritual aids. In the absence of the regular ministry, the most isolated member of the Church finds counsel, encouragement, and consolation, from the exhorter or the class-leader. While the wisely-graduated hierarchy of Methodism enables it to extend itself even to the farthest limits of civilization, by the same arrangement it reaches the lowest strata of society." \*

- The numerical strength of Methodism at the death of Wesley is summed up in the following figures : itinerant preachers, 511, of whom 294 belonged to Europe, and 217 to America ; members, 120,233, of whom 71,668 belonged to Europe, and 48,565 to America.

These magnificent results demonstrated to Wesley the complete success of his mission, and amply compensated him for the sufferings through which he had passed. He went the way of all the earth, accompanied by the benedictions of more than one hundred and twenty thousand souls won from the ways of sin in the two hemispheres ; while on the eternal shore thousands more welcomed him as their spiritual father, who had been gathered in before him to the bosom of their God.

These great numerical results were themselves only the promise of still greater yet to come. Methodism was not

\* *Revue des Deux-Mondes*, 15th of August, 1859.



to die with Wesley. So far from that, it has displayed a marvellous vitality, and exists to-day in almost every part of the globe. Great Britain and the United States continue to be the principal centres from whence its influence is diffused. In the latter country in particular, it has had extraordinary success: the total separation of the Church from the State has there been most beneficial in its effects, and Methodism has become the first in importance and largest in number of the Churches of the land. The Methodist Episcopal Church North, the most considerable section of American Methodism, celebrated its centenary year in 1866 with a total of more than a million members, and its progress is so rapid that its increase since then exceeds a hundred thousand.\*

The Methodist missions, as sustained by the English and American Churches, are actually at the head of all other Protestant missions in the number of their missionaries, the total of their Church-members, and the amount of their funds: they extend through all quarters of the globe, and are maintained at an annual cost of £300,000, contributed by the Societies.

It is calculated that the various Methodist churches and congregations throughout the world, which embrace the doctrines preached by Wesley, and retain the chief features of his ecclesiastical discipline, number in the aggregate some eighteen thousand travelling preachers, nearly three millions of communicants, and about twelve millions of regular hearers. For a parallel to such success we should have to go back to the apostolic age.

To these direct and positive results of the Methodist movement, we must now add others which, though more general and indirect, yet are related to it as effect to cause.

All historians at the present day agree, that while the last century was for continental Europe a period of decay

\* Or, in four years (to 1870), two hundred thousand.—Tr.

and dissolution, in Great Britain it witnessed one of those beneficial crises which regenerate a nation's life and open up an era of indefinite progress. In fact, while everywhere else convictions were being stifled and character poisoned by the deadly breath of scepticism, this great people in their solitary island-home were rebuilding, step by step, the tottering edifice of faith and morals. Hence when at the close of this century the tocsin of revolution sounded, and ancient institutions shared the fate of the ancient principles on which they had been founded, amid the general ruin England alone stood secure.

This regeneration of England was the especial work of Methodism, and impartial history at length recognizes the fact. While the sagacious Priestley observed in his day that, "Methodism has not only Christianized but civilized that part of the nation which had been overlooked by a clergy too careful of its dignity," Macaulay, in our own, makes light of "some writers of books called Histories of England in the reign of George II., in which the rise of Methodism is not mentioned," and says that in a hundred years "such a breed of authors will be extinct." Even in France, writers who have studied the history of the century, have generally done justice to the paramount influence of Wesley and his work ; and these testimonies, coming from a quarter so thoroughly disinterested, are too valuable to be passed by.

M. Edmond Scherer calls Methodism "a movement which has changed the face of England," and he adds, "Yes, England, as we know it to-day, with its chaste and grave literature, with its Biblical language and its national piety, with its middle classes whose exemplary morality gives so much weight to the country, England is the work of Methodism. Methodism has done more than establish one sect, it has quickened all others : it has pervaded the Established Church with its influence, it has restored to

their due place the doctrines of the Reformation, it has aroused the clergy, and communicated to them its own missionary spirit."

The testimony of M. Cornelius De Witt is still more cordial: "Wesley's faith was active and diffusive; his courage was proof against ridicule as well as violence, and his organizing genius equalled that of the founders of the great monastic orders. Wesley had another merit, exceedingly rare amongst innovators. The spirit of reform did not destroy in him the spirit of genuine conservatism. In forming a religious Society, it was no part of his design to found a religious sect. A minister of the Established Church and an observer of its failings, he felt that to awaken the parish clergy it was necessary to create a clergy of another kind; that to announce the Gospel to those who never went to church, or who only heard there frigid exhortations, it was necessary to organize an army of ardent missionaries; that to reach the heart of the masses, it was necessary to seek them in the fields, the market-places, and the alleys of the large towns, and to preach to them in their own vulgar tongue.

"While his separation from the Anglican Church was wider than he wished, the benefit he conferred upon it far exceeds anything he could ever have hoped or conceived. He did something more than stimulate its activity by exciting its jealousy: he acted on it by his preaching, his example, and the diffusive warmth of his faith. He did not merely inspire into it an ecclesiastical zeal, that kind of interested zeal which may co-exist with indifference to the salvation of souls: he resuscitated its spiritual life and renovated its moral efficiency. If the England of to-day no longer resembles the England of the early part of the eighteenth century, it is mainly due to John Wesley."\*

\* *French Society and English Society in the 18th Century*, p. 237.

Let us cite finally the opinion of M. Saint-Marc-Girardin :  
“ While France was more and more abandoning herself to the philosophical spirit, in England the religious spirit was being awakened and diffused through the influence of Methodism. When I read the lives of Wesley and Whitefield, I admire the power of individual faith. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, there had been in England a retrograde movement, tending to produce irreligion. Voltaire there caught the contagion of infidelity, and introduced it into France. This ascendancy of unbelief did not for one moment daunt Wesley and Whitefield. They resolved by thought and by speech to undo what thought and speech had done, and to oppose the freedom of faith to the license of godlessness. They preached and wrote, they were ridiculed and persecuted, they persevered until they conquered. Wesley and his disciples revived the Christian spirit in the breasts of those who opposed them. English society was rendered stronger and more religious by the battles waged for Methodism and against it ; and, as that faith could not but be genuine which had been rekindled amid such opposition, when the question arose of the abolition of slavery, the same faith wrought for thirty years till it was accomplished.”

These testimonies, coming from opposite quarters, agree in attributing to Wesley and Methodism a large share in the moral renovation of England. It was not a moral revolution only, but it affected all the interests of society. The working-classes were the first to feel its influence : the lower quarters of the great cities, the manufacturing and colliery districts, where vice and misery reigned, were, as we have seen, a favourite field of labour for Wesley and his auxiliaries. These degraded populations, under the influence of evangelical preaching, were gradually transformed. Not only did numerous conversions take place, but the general standard rapidly rose : manners were

softened and improved, and a thirst for knowledge imparted. Kingswood, Cornwall, Staffordshire, Northumberland, in the course of a few years witnessed a marvellous reformation among their populations of miners and colliers, but lately abandoned to the worst excesses and dreaded for their brutality. Everywhere throughout the country chapels sprung up, and were filled by multitudes who formerly frequented the public-houses. Modest cottages, wearing an air of comfort and order, gradually replaced the hideous hovels where formerly many families herded together pell-mell. Public schools and libraries began to appear, as the intellectual needs of the people, hitherto unthought of, began to be felt.

As they rose in the scale of morals, the lower classes necessarily exerted an influence upon the upper, and the movement spread from the lowest strata of society till it reached the highest. The moral standard of the nation had risen so high that it of necessity imposed itself even on that corrupt and venal aristocracy which, at first sight, seemed so incorrigible. Under the pressure of the middle and lower classes, which rose rapidly in morality and dignity, it was absolutely necessary that the upper classes should make proportionate progress, if they wished to retain their ascendancy. Happily, such a change did in fact take place, and history nowhere exhibits a more radical transformation.

The Anglican Church which, according to Priestley, had cared more for its own dignity than for the wants of the people, had long been accessory to the irregularities of the nobility, and had even encouraged religious indifference. But it, too, was visited and transformed by the Revival, which introduced to its ranks such men as Perronet, Fletcher, Grimshaw, Romaine, Venn, Berridge, Newton, and by their means effected a remarkable improvement.

A similar change was brought about in the Dissenting Churches which, although not so hopelessly decayed, had lost their influence upon the masses. They became so imbued with the spirit of the Methodist movement that they recovered their ancient zeal, and, by their contact with the ardent missionaries of the Revival, were quickened into new life.

This grand work of reformation, in which the English nation renewed its youth, pervaded every circle,—social, political, intellectual, and moral. A chaste and healthy literature took the place of the impure productions of the previous age. Johnson and Goldsmith, with other writers, in creating a purer popular literature, doubtless contributed to this great revolution.

A great revolution truly, which, following on the heels of the political revolution of the previous century, has created modern England, that nation which has set the world an example of the power and permanence of liberal institutions based on the foundation of the Gospel.

Let us learn to admire those men who gave to humanity one of those salutary impulses which propel it along its heaven-appointed course. Admiration brings us nearer to them, and in a certain sense imbues us with their spirit, and causes us to live their life and share their work. And, remembering what they accomplished with resources so limited, we shall the better understand what we may do in the sphere in which we are placed.

Let us learn above all to remember that man is but God's instrument, and that to God alone belongs the glory of those mighty enterprises of which we, ignorant and short-sighted as we are, can only contemplate the human side. Wesley and Whitefield, like Luther and Calvin, and like all faithful teachers of the truth, knew that they were only God's instruments ; and what we must admire in them

even more than their great achievements is that profound humility which taught them to ascribe all the glory to God. This is also the sentiment that animates us as we survey the work of Wesley, and this sentiment is well expressed in the words with which our fathers loved to conclude their books, and which shall conclude ours :—

“ SOLI DEO GLORIA ! ”

“ TO GOD ALONE BE THE GLORY ! ”

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